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"God and Man in Comics"

"Nostalgia as Myopia"

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On Comics Opinion and Comics Review

LOC

Number 4, January 1982

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mascot

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THE NEXT NIGHT, AT THE PLANET, AS CLARK WORKS ON A LATE EDITION...
JOKER FRIEND LOANED ME THIS PROP MACHINE GUN! HE SAID IT FIRES BLANKS! I'LL TRY IT OUT!
I GASP! I DON'T AIM IT AT ME, PLEASE! IT MAY BE LOADED WITH REAL BULLETS!
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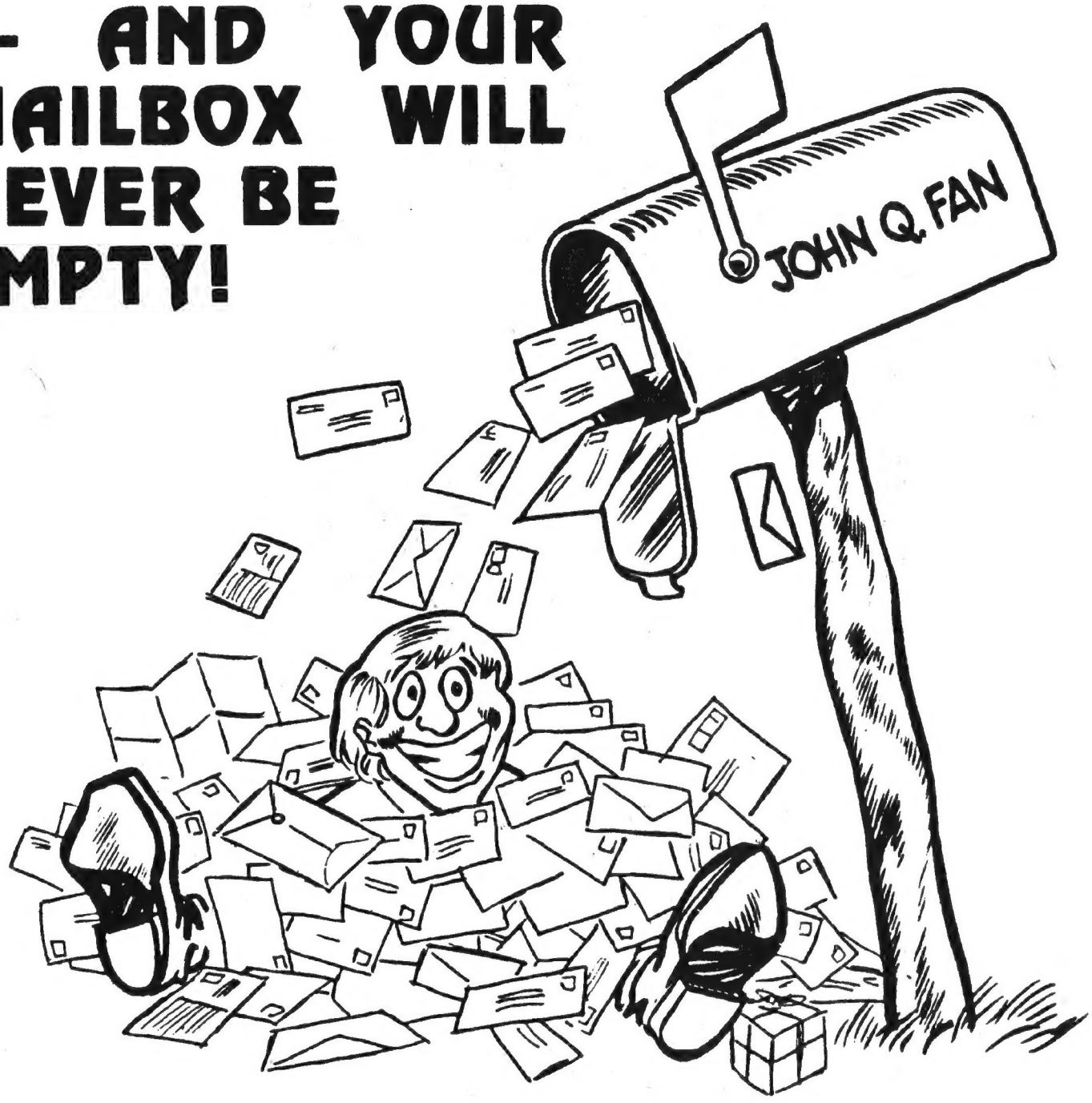

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LINES OF COMMUNICATION

EDITORIAL by BOB SORON

This issue, Mark Evanier and Dwight Decker both bring up interrelated points. In **"What It Was Was Fandom,"** Evanier discusses what are known as "the good old days" by those who were in fandom then. Decker, in his letter, talks about the narrow-mindedness of the fan whose interest lies solely in the DC or Marvel super-hero. One of the major points both present is that there is a lot out there that people are missing.

Fandom has been around for over twenty years now. I can't claim to have been involved back then; next year will be my tenth anniversary. But I've been around long enough to agree **and** disagree.

Fandom's circumstances now, needless to say, are different from the circumstances of twenty years ago. Super-heroes were fairly new to many readers; some of the older readers remembered the Golden Age, but few remembered it first-hand. But everyone had read comics. And, since there were no direct-sales shops, people had to read what was available. That may have meant super-hero, humor, war, mystery, or even [hold on to your seats] romance [admittedly unlikely in a boy's case, unless he was able to recognize and follow certain art styles]. Everybody knew a little about something, and was talking about it with as many other people as could be found. If it turned out that the artist who drew **"Sub-Mariner"** also drew romance stuff, maybe it was worth a look.

That chance isn't so available any more. The other genres slowly succumbed to attrition. Today war, mystery, and super-heroes are the only genres with more than one example.

But these days, people are still interested in talking about these different things! It's just that they're talking about them with other people they know are interested. For instance, note Interlac and X-Apa, amateur publishing alliances devoted in name to **"The Legion of Super-Heroes"** and **"The X-Men."** They are actually more devoted to the parent companies of those two titles; there is plenty of talk about those comics, but there is plenty of talk about other comics and subjects.

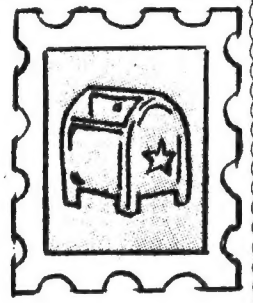
Here at **LOC**, we're always ready to print an article on something a little different—and the response we get is generally pleasing. We're **still** getting mail on Carol Kalish's **"Why Women Read Archie Comics."** **"God and Man in Comic Books,"** Lou Mougin's series, has gotten enthusiastic response. People **are** interested in other topics. But it seems that they're less interested in being the first to bring it up.

There is plenty of material out there. Let's **all** learn from one another. Be loud; be **rude** if you must [avoid being obnoxious, of course]. Let others know about something they've ignored. It's all fun, one way or another. Ignore the trends set by dealers—spread the word about what is really worthwhile.

And, if you'd rather tell a lot of people at once—let **us** know. Your letters, and articles, on any topic, may very well have a home here.

LETTERHACK'S NIGHTMARE #7
There comes a time in every fan's trials when...
My first letter...
Dear Editor: I think DUMMY THE BARBARIAN is great...
LITTLE LEAGUE
And eventually, it comes to the editor's attention...
These damn writers never answer their mail! I'll fix them...
EDITOR
Dear Brat: Why don't you read something worthwhile, like ULYSSES. When I was in school, we didn't mess around with funny books
good stuff, books written
al talent! Do yourself a
fast! And another thing,
manship, have you con-
And get a job! I
who reads funny
TIC TAC TIC
A TIP OF THE HAT...
CRAIG THOMAS Hallmark, Mo

Kurt Busiek is a creative writing major at Syracuse University.



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NOT ALL OF THEM WANT TO HELP MANKIND... SOME HATE THE HUMAN RACE, AND WISH TO DESTROY IT. SOME FEEL THAT THE MUTANTS SHOULD BE THE REAL RULERS OF EARTH! IT IS OUR JOB TO PROTECT MANKIND FROM THOSE... FROM THE EVIL MUTANTS!

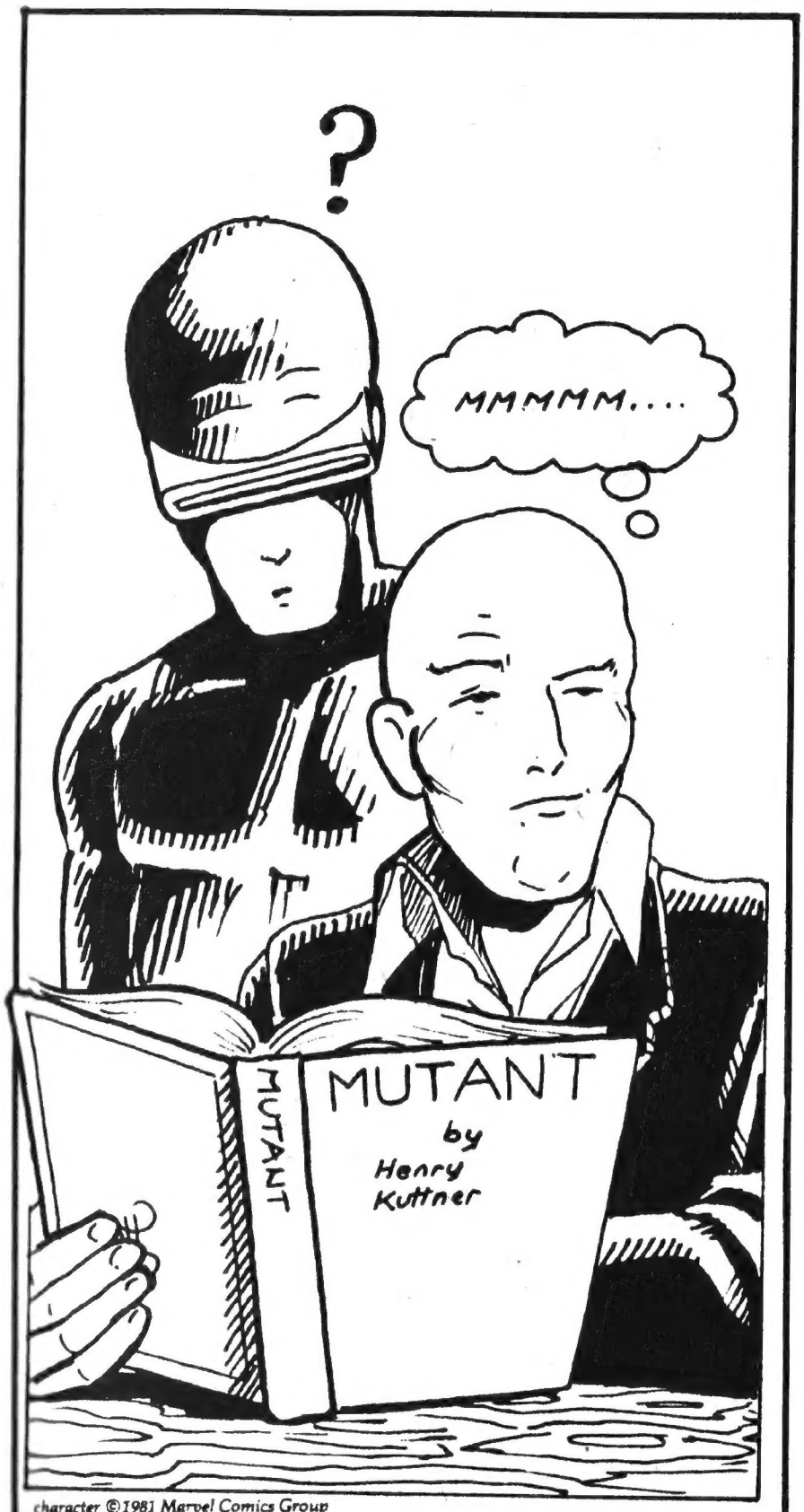
MUTANT: THE ORIGIN OF THE X-MEN?

by Kurt Busiek

Shortly after I began collecting comics, I discovered **X-MEN #37** in a comic book store. The cover intrigued me, because if, as one of the blurbs said, these blue-and-yellow uniformed people were "on trial for treason against Homo Superior," that meant they had to be Homo Superior themselves, and not just ordinary super-heroes. So, figuring I had little to lose, I bought it. And the opening sequence, with these five for-the-most-part normal teenagers using super-powers almost casually, as if they were born with them, had me completely entranced. As the story wore on, and it started revolving around these good mutants and these bad mutants fighting over world domination—well, needless to say, I could tell that **THE X-MEN** was a different sort of comic book than all the others, and I was soon well on my way to amassing a complete collection. About a year after that first meeting with Marvel's merry mutants, I was browsing through the local library's science fiction department, looking for something interesting to read, and I spotted a book by Lewis Padgett, entitled **MUTANT**. I picked it up, figuring that it would be about the typical radiation-spawned monstrosities one finds on TV sf, but upon reading the dust jacket, I found to my surprise that these mutants were super-powered humans, too! Just like The X-Men! And so, since the jacket said it was a **classic** sf novel, I again figured I didn't have anything to lose, and checked the novel out. Boy, was I surprised. **MUTANT** and **THE X-MEN** had many more similarities than just being about super-powered humans. In fact, the book and the comic book were **so** similar that there had to be some sort of direct relationship between the two—and to this day, I'm still convinced that **MUTANT** is a direct ancestor of **THE X-MEN**. Let me tell you why. . .

THE X-MEN (in its original run), as almost all of you know, features a quintet of super-heroic mutants, each with his or her own specialized mutant power, led by Professor Xavier, a bald telepath. **MUTANT** (by Henry Kuttner, as it turns out; Lewis Padgett is only a pseudonym) has no such diversity—every mutant in the novel has exactly the same mutation: they were **all** bald telepaths. Hard radiation from a nuclear war caused an evolutionary jump in the genetic pattern of those who lived closest to the radioactive areas, and the result is that little Charles Xaviers keep popping up, fully telepathic, before the evolutionary chain is ready for them. This in itself indicates a strong possibility that the comic book and the novel are related, what with the foremost member of Marvel's mutant community possessing almost precisely the same mutant power as Kuttner's mutants (the difference being that while Xavier demonstrates powers beyond telepathy—mental force bolts, astral image projection, and so on—the telepaths in **MUTANT** have no abilities other than telepathy). The different super-powers possessed by the five "fighting" X-Men are necessary because of the nature of the comics medium: Telepathy isn't incredibly visual, and a diversity of powers makes for interesting action sequences and a more readily comprehensible difference in personalities.

More than the similarity of the mutation, however, **THE X-MEN** and **MUTANT** share the same base of conflict. In **THE X-MEN**, the good mutants (Professor X, Cyclops and the gang) fight the evil mutants (Magneto and his crew) to keep the evil mutants from taking over Earth and subjugating humanity. In **MUTANT**, the "good" mutants are the sane, rational ones able to deal with daily life in a non-telepathic world (essentially what Xavier's



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Henry Kuttner's book *MUTANT*, first published in 1953, features many similarities to *THE X-MEN*, which debuted ten years later.

school was set up to teach, by the way], and the "evil" ones are paranoids with an insane conviction that they have to wrest control of the planet from the inferior humans, enslave them, and run the world to mutantkind's benefit. Also present in both is the idea of a wary humanity that knows of mutantkind's existence, and though it mistrusts the new "race," it is unsure of what to do about it, unsure whether to wipe the mutants out or to leave them alone. [This three-pronged division of humanity—in-

to good super-powered beings, evil super-powered beings bent on conquest, and normal humans caught in the middle—might be seen as partial basis for Jack Kirby's **ETERNALS** series, but in that particular case it's slim evidence.] So at this point it becomes pretty clear that **MUTANT** [copyright 1953] has to have been read by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, or both, and used as the inspiration for **THE X-MEN** [which first appeared a decade later in 1963]. The basics of the stories are far too similar to have been coincidental, and most of the differences can be explained by the transition from science-fiction novel to super-hero comic book. The futuristic world of **MUTANT** gets traded in for a more contemporary milieu, bringing in a host of incidental changes along with it. It's interesting to note, though, that the traditional super-heroic secret identity **schtick** is already present in **MUTANT**, and is used there for the same reason it's used in **THE X-MEN**: to keep anti-mutant tensions low. The hairless mutants, in an attempt to blend in with normal humanity, wear wigs, false eyelashes and false eyebrows, just as The X-Men take off their costumes and restrain their physical differences in order to keep their mutations from being detected.

Beyond the obvious links, there are themes in **MUTANT** that are developed differently, or not at all, in **THE X-MEN**, and that's part of what makes the book [and the comparison] so fascinating. In **MUTANT**, for example, humanity never becomes truly aware that there are paranoid mutants intent on global conquest. The entire conflict between the two strains of mutant is played out behind humanity's back, with the same mutants fighting not only to thwart the paranoid mutants' schernes, but also to keep humanity from realizing that the conflict exists. This is as important as it is because in Kuttner's novel, the normal human society is very much warier of the mutants in their midst than the Lee/Kirby Marvel humans seem to be. The sane mutants, for their own self-protection, must never allow the humans to realize that a sizeable portion of mutantkind is potentially lethal, because in that situation, the humans would react in self-defense, and wipe out all the mutants indiscriminately. It's a simple matter of racial survival, and it's this that makes the paranoids' insanity dangerous—what with their great power, they cannot comprehend that due to sheer numbers [and thus physical power] the non-telepathic humans make the rules. This is something that can be seen in **THE X-MEN**, but is never overtly stated since [though it heightens the sense of danger in **MUTANT**] it would undercut the conflict in **THE X-MEN** to be told that Magneto's goals are ultimately unreachable, at least as society exists now. In the early issues of **THE X-MEN**, Magneto and his Brotherhood of Evil Mutants are only five people, and while they're adept at

holding fortified positions against modest forces [as in #4] or at fighting a team like The X-Men, they would be helpless if the armies of the world organized against them. Magneto, with his immense magnetic power, might last for longer than one of Kuttner's telepaths, since almost all mankind's armaments are made of metal, but he could not hold out forever against the physical force and weaponry which an aroused humanity could muster, much less conquer the world. To continually reiterate [as Kuttner does in **MUTANT**] that the evil mutants face impossible odds would hurt the comic book series in that The X-Men are purportedly fighting for Law and Order [i.e. a threat to organized society] rather than for racial survival [i.e. a threat to themselves], as is the case in **MUTANT.**

AND THUS BEGINS THE WORLD'S STRANGEST MEETING --BETWEEN THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL HOMO SUPERIORS...
ONLY YOU AND YOUR X-MEN STAND BETWEEN THE MUTANTS AND WORLD CONQUEST! WHY? WHY DO YOU FIGHT US?! FOR YOU TOO ARE A MUTANT!!
BUT I SEEK TO SAVE MANKIND, NOT DESTROY IT!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

Both *MUTANT* and *THE X-MEN* feature mutants who are after world conquest, with good mutants trying to stop them.

However, as in most 1960s Marvel Comics, **THE X-MEN** presents not only a battle for Law and Order, but also a personalized conflict, in which the danger to the heroes is almost—if not fully—as important as the threat to humanity at large. Here it becomes a threat to racial survival, since while the other Marvel heroes can be construed to be representative of humanity at large, The X-Men are not. They're representative of good mutantkind, and the danger to them personally is the same as the danger to the sane mutants in **MUTANT**. They are stuck in the middle between a humanity which, if it knew the whole story, would wipe them out along with Magneto, and the evil mutants who are actively trying to wipe them out anyway. This is personified in **THE X-MEN** by the second most popular X-Men antagonists [after Magneto and the Evil Mutants]—The Sentinels. The Sentinels have always tried indiscriminately to capture [or destroy] mutants as a race, making no distinctions between good and evil. More often than not, they go after The X-Men first, since they're more readily available than the evil ones. This conflict has nothing really to do with Law and Order, or the preservation of society [since the mutants would not be missed], but a question of racial survival, and whether mutantkind has the right to exist in a non-mutant world.

This brings up another set of ideas, one rarely stated in **THE X-MEN**. Professor Xavier and his band of mutants are **not** fighting to keep the Earth from being ruled by mutants. Rather, they are fighting to keep the Evil Mutants from forcing evolution and destroying mutantkind by jumping the gun. Mutants are presented as **homo superior**, the next step in mankind's evolution, and in that case, just as **homo sapiens** took over from **homo neanderthalis** thousands of years ago, mutantkind is the wave of the future, just as Magneto says it is. One day, mutants will rule the Earth, if for no other reason than that due to the increase in mutant births and the decrease in non-mutant births, the world will eventually be populated entirely by mutants, just as the neanderthals died out, leaving us in charge. What Xavier is fighting for, then, is a peaceful coexistence between **homo sapiens** and **homo superior**, leaving it up to natural selection rather than physical force to put mutantkind in control. Naturally, this cannot be stated in a super-hero comic, because though it's logical, moral, and very sensible, it impugns the honor of the heroes. After all, the readers don't want to be told that they are inferior beings, and that the heroes they're reading about are their replacements rather than just their champions. The only mention this idea gets in **THE X-MEN** is that Professor X's stated goal is to teach mutants to deal with their powers, rather than lashing out in fear and anger at a similarly scared, angry humanity. This is just a diplomatic way of saying that the Professor is advocating a non-violent, slow takeover of the world by mutants. Whether violence could be avoided altogether in such a situation is highly unlikely—once mutantkind's ranks swell to such an extent that humanity is no longer the major power, a physical take-over of government by the mutants seems inevitable, but since that aspect of evolution will never enter into **THE X-MEN**, there's no need to stress it there.

One aspect of evolution which does create a few problems with the whole notion of **homo superior** is again pointed out by comparing **MUTANT** and **THE X-MEN**. The mutation breeds **true** in **MUTANT**—a telepath will have telepaths for children, and the children will have telepathic children, and so on until the world is telepathic. But no such consistent mutation is present in **THE X-MEN**. Almost all the identified mutants have dissimilar powers, and the few instances of mutants having children we can find show no true inheritance of traits [for example, Magneto's children, Quicksilver and The Scarlet Witch, have wildly different abilities than their magnetic pop]. So the question of Marvel's mutants be-

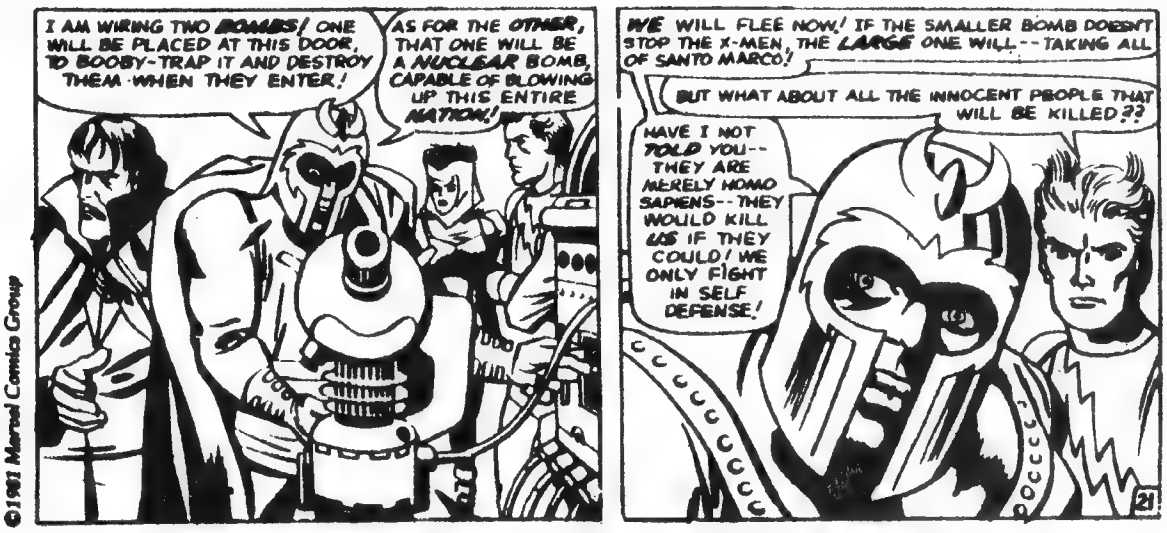
ing the next evolutionary step is in doubt. However, since the writers, editors, and knowledgable authorities within the context of **THE X-MEN** all treat the current state of mutation as a truly evolutionary leap, precipitated mostly by radiation, we can only assume that the next stage in mankind's evolution is an unstable, diverse one, where humanity develops literally thousands of new abilities which change from generation to generation. Perhaps by Darwinian selection, one or a few of those traits will breed true, and the mutation will stabilize, but, as far as Marvel Comics is concerned, not in the near future.

THE X-MEN holds another element to soft-pedal the "racial survival" angle inherent in the concept. Unlike **MUTANT**, the comic book's presentation of anti-mutant feelings among the humans tends to parallel that of the prejudice against blacks and other minorities—instead of disliking the mutants because they are a danger, a potential threat [as Kuttner's humans tend to], they dislike the mutants because they are "different," just as blacks are "different." The fact that they really **are** different falls into the background at times like this, as the writers continually reiterate through The X-Men's colorful, congenial personalities, the ways in which they are like us—their concerns over love, recreation, the responsibilities of adulthood and so on—so familiar to us—make their super-powers seem inconsequential, especially in a world upon which non-mutants gain super-powers with astonishing regularity. This solves any problems **THE X-MEN** might have had that would keep it from being an effective super-hero vehicle, and might explain why the middle-class [except for The Angel] WASP super-hero team never had any minority members [until the advent of the new group], and yet never seemed the slightest bit racist—they were all minority characters, just by dint of their mutanthood!

Another way in which **THE X-MEN** differs from **MUTANT** is that the characters in the latter are primarily adults, while the comic books series centers around teenagers. This was a canny decision on either Lee's or Kirby's part, because it meant that The X-Men would be closer in age and personal concerns to the average readership, and [especially with the Professor X/father figure character] that **THE X-MEN** would appeal to the unsure adolescent—particularly the "outcast" adolescent who would be more likely to read comics than his "well-adjusted" peers. [The Juggernaut, The X-Men's third most important villain, though he has nothing to do with the "mutant" angle of the book, is an excellent example of this process at work. Cain Marko is first presented to the reader [in **X-MEN #12**] as the consummate school bully—he even pushes parental Charles Xavier [as a child, of course] around. The idea of a nemesis so familiar to the reader being given unstoppable powers results in a chilling villain

guaranteed to strike a chord in any schoolkid. Sadly, this aspect of The Juggernaut seems to have been forgotten, only to concentrate on his physical power, which is ultimately uninteresting due to his limited fighting style. Perhaps this is why no Juggernaut story has ever been able to compete with the very first one.]

I've been dealing so far with **THE X-MEN**, mostly, and the ways in which it takes off from ideas present in **MUTANT**, but **MUTANT** itself develops its themes in fascinating ways, and deserves separate consideration. The differences of the prose novel format make some things possible that could never happen in **THE X-MEN**, and also provide a different environment to develop its themes in, exposing different sides of them in interesting ways. The future world which Kuttner presents, for example, is tailor-made for this sort of conflict—it's a world where the individual is far more important than in our own, and large-scale conflicts can be played out on a much more personal level. After the nuclear war ended, rather than rebuild society as it existed previously, mankind chose to live in small, inde-


I AM WIRING TWO BOMBS! ONE WILL BE PLACED AT THIS DOOR, TO BOOBY-TRAP IT AND DESTROY THEM WHEN THEY ENTER!
AS FOR THE OTHER, THAT ONE WILL BE A NUCLEAR BOMB, CAPABLE OF BLOWING UP THIS ENTIRE NATION!
WE WILL FLEE NOW! IF THE SMALLER BOMB DOESN'T STOP THE X-MEN, THE LARGE ONE WILL--TAKING ALL OF SANTO MARCO!
BUT WHAT ABOUT ALL THE INNOCENT PEOPLE THAT WILL BE KILLED??
HAVE I NOT TOLD YOU-- THEY ARE MERELY HOMO SAPIENS--THEY WOULD KILL US IF THEY COULD! WE ONLY FIGHT IN SELF DEFENSE!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group
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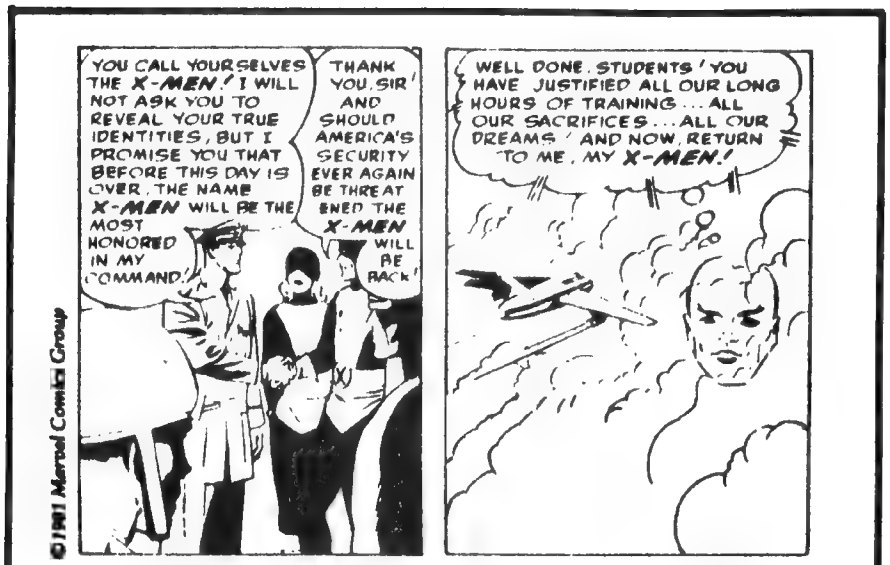
Magneto is similar to the antagonists in *MUTANT*; they feel that they are superior to humans, and therefore should control the world.

pendent communities, interlocked by trade. None of these towns is allowed to expand to the point at which the danger might exist of its becoming a war-like nation—its neighbors will simply drop a small atomic bomb on any town that gets too big for its own (and its neighbors' own) good. Reflecting this independence, the feelings and status of each individual is important, and a duelling code exists, where insults to honor or other such offenses are solved through personal combat. It's not any sort of throwback to the past, however—the developments of mankind are very evident, particularly in the fields of technology and psychology. It's merely a society in which personal conflicts (like a potential duel between a telepath and a non-telepath, for example) assume great significance. The war between the sane and paranoid mutants runs through this world as a set of conflicts between individuals, which makes the story crisp and powerful. However, the fact that there might be only two or three men in direct conflict does not make it any less a war. The story spans two hundred years, something a contemporary-setting comic book cannot do, and creates an epic, historical feel to the book. Repercussions from each conflict are felt through the years, building from conflict to conflict until the whole thing comes together at the climax. And there **is** a climax, another thing a continuing-series comic book cannot have. The sane mutant/paranoid mutant/human tangle reaches an end, and for **X-MEN** fans, this might be reason enough alone to pick up the book—to find out how "The X-Men's story" ends.

Aside from that, Henry Kuttner is also a very skilled story-teller, adept at creating interesting characters and describing the situations they find themselves in in simple, dramatic prose. He clearly knows what he's doing all the way through the book, and the thrust of the story never lets up, never dwells on unnecessary details or runs off at a tangent to what it should be dealing with. (As well as **MUTANT**, I highly recommend **THE BEST OF HENRY KUTTNER** and **ROBOTS HAVE NO TAILS** as very well-crafted science fiction anthologies worth reading.)

And for those of you who read comics because you're addicted to super-heroes, I hasten to point out that **MUTANT** has them in it, too. There are two instances where realio-trulio super-heroes find their way into the plot. The first appears in the first chapter, "The Piper's Son." The Green Man is a physical and mental marvel, who has adventure after adventure, fighting trolls, city apes, dimension changers—all in a serial adventure format that young telepaths latch into, very much like super-hero comics are today, except that The Green Man is a paranoid invention, a propaganda super-hero designed to lead young telepaths into believing that non-telepaths are less than sentient beings who deserve only contempt and obliteration. The other super-hero actually appears within the context of **MUTANT**. He is The Cody, and a more bizarre super-hero this side of Matter-Eater Lad would be hard to find. He's a super-strong, super-fast, telepathic hero dressed in skintight red, black, and silver—but he also happens to be—purportedly—a woods spirit, a creature of the forests rather than the towns, and a figure of woods lore and folk wisdom. My description here of the incongruous fellow is by far too tame; The Cody has to be read to be believed. And there's more, which I haven't even touched on—the various permutations of mutant-kind, the character after character who add new angle after new angle of exploring the theme—the novel is just full of great stuff, and to do justice to it would not only take far more space than is available here, but it would take all the fun out of reading it, by ruining all the surprises.

Anyone who is interested in **THE X-MEN** or com-


YOU CALL YOURSELVES THE X-MEN! I WILL NOT ASK YOU TO REVEAL YOUR TRUE IDENTITIES, BUT I PROMISE YOU THAT BEFORE THIS DAY IS OVER, THE NAME X-MEN WILL BE THE MOST HONORED IN MY COMMAND!
THANK YOU, SIR! AND SHOULD AMERICA'S SECURITY EVER AGAIN BE THREATENED THE X-MEN WILL BE BACK!
WELL DONE, STUDENTS! YOU HAVE JUSTIFIED ALL OUR LONG HOURS OF TRAINING... ALL OUR SACRIFICES... ALL OUR DREAMS! AND NOW, RETURN TO ME, MY X-MEN!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group
The government demonstrates its support of mutants.

ics in general would benefit from reading **MUTANT**, both as a fascinating historical piece [examining the way in which an artistically and commercially successful comic book series [since the issues of **THE X-MEN** that rely most on **MUTANT** are the first fifteen or so, which provided the basis for the magazine's original 66-issue run] was developed from a strong concept] and as a companion piece to **THE X-MEN**, since it develops the themes present in **THE X-MEN** far more completely and in depth than **THE X-MEN** ever has. For anyone who writes **THE X-MEN**, the novel should be required reading, since it dramatically and clearly explains the basis of the entire series. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby—if either of you are reading this—you needn't bother hunting up **MUTANT**. You must have done so long ago.

What Did The Last Neaderthal Say To The First Cro-Magnon?

Longtime **X-MEN** readers will recognize the question above as one that kept popping up in **"X-Men"** stories—mostly to dramatize the difference between mutantkind and humanity—but for those of you interested in such things, there is a book just recently published that takes the subject of both Henry Kuttner's **MUTANT** and **THE X-MEN**, evolution of species, and examines it in historical, rather than science-fictional, terms. **THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR,** by Jean M. Auel, published by Crown Publishers, Inc., follows the adventures of a Cro-Magnon girl who gets adopted into a Neanderthal clan.

When Ayla's parents are killed in an earthquake, the 5-year old Cro-Magnon finds herself alone in a hostile world, unable to fend for herself. Eventually, near death, she gets rescued by a clan of Neanderthals [the "Clan of the Cave Bear," in case you hadn't guessed] who are searching for a new home, and she is nursed back to health. In the process, by luck or fate, Ayla manages to lead the clan to a new cave, and they become convinced that she is a being favored by the spirits and brings luck, so they adopt her into the clan. What follows is a brilliantly-researched novel setting the difficulties engendered by Ayla's different genetic traits from the Neanderthal clan against a pattern of prehistoric daily life. Ayla's presence in the clan causes various upheavals in the genetically hidebound Neanderthal society, as she tries to adapt to their way of life with such handicaps as a brain that can conceive of higher numbers than twenty, the capacity for complex speech, and a penchant for figuring out how to do things, rather than relying on the Neanderthal racial memory [which she doesn't possess] and rigid training.

The novel goes into great detail in describing the lives, characters, traditions, and beliefs of both the clan and Ayla in a gripping, enjoyable novel set at the end of the evolutionary trail for one race, and the beginning for another. It's listed as the first novel in the **"Earth's Children"** series, which means we can look forward to more books developing a fascinating story about prehistoric man, survival, and evolution. Even if you've never cared whether the last Neanderthal was even on speaking terms with the first Cro-Magnon or not, it's worth your time to find and read **THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR**, because really good books come along so infrequently that each one should be encouraged.

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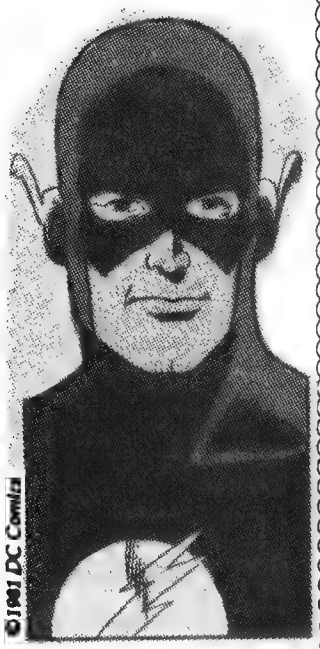
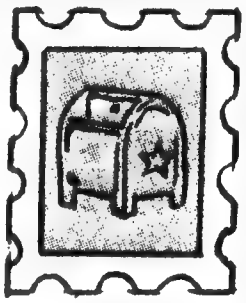


Bryan Uhlenbrock has been a fieldworker, a carpenter, a door-to-door solicitor, a "welfare bum," and a musician. He currently works as a photographer. He has also sold an article to *AMAZING WORLD OF DC COMICS*, which has yet to see publication.



NOSTALGIA AS MYOPIA

by Bryan Uhlenbrock

I saw approaching the wave of 1960 s nostalgia nearly five years ago. When **HAPPY DAYS** was making The Fonz America's favorite culture hero from the GoodOldDays, when "Grease" was the word and black leather jackets came back in style, I was predicting an eventual resurgence in psychedelia and social activism. The success of the stage show **BEATLEMANIA**, and the heavily-hyped (but ultimately disappointing) film version of **HAIR** brought me a certain measure of satisfaction for this reason . . . but recent events have pointed out the folly of nostalgia as a way of life.

Just as **HAPPY DAYS** managed to blithely ignore the existence of Joe McCarthy and transform the brooding menace of the leather-jacketed tough into the reliable, lovable, and infinitely cool Fonzie; the burgeoning 1960 s revival that is beginning to make its presence felt in the public consciousness—and which is almost painfully obvious in many of the comic books being produced today—is the result of a very real cultural myopia. It is composed of equal parts revulsion towards present-day reality and fondness for an imperfectly-perceived time-gone-by.

There was a time when I would have welcomed the current wave of 1960 s nostalgia . . . today, I see disturbing, bloody parallels in the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and the Kennedy brothers and the recent loss of John Lennon. I see the President of the United States appearing almost anxious to re-live the national trauma of Viet Nam, only this time on our own continent and under our own terms . . . and I shudder. I remember "how we did it in California" [Reagan was quoted as saying, "If there's going to be a bloodbath, let's get it over with!" on the eve of one of Berkeley's bloodiest riots] and I'm torn between laughing and crying. Tell me we're not going to have to go through the whole damned thing again. Tell me we've learned something from the mistakes of the past. Tell me it isn't so. . .

Holy Time-Warp and Face Front, True Believers; it is indeed so. The 1960 s are on their way back, and in no quarter is this so obvious as in the pages of your favorite comic book. Actually, it should come as no surprise that comics welcome this event whole-heartedly. The 1960 s were a banner decade for the comics form. They saw the emergence of Marvel Comics as we know them today, as well as the birth of the "underground" comic. Both **BATMAN** and **ARCHIE** had circulations in excess of one million copies per issue. The entire attitude of the American people towards comic books improved considerably during the 1960's, and the bastard medium that had once been denounced on the floor of Congress was lionized as "pop art." Of **course** the comics industry approves of the nascent 1960 s nostalgia fad. They are, in fact, actively promoting it.

Witness Carmine Infantino's triumphant return to the pages of **THE FLASH.** Witness Bill Sinkiewicz's Neal Adams impersonation in the pages of **FANTASTIC FOUR #231** and the attendant "**next issue**" blurb which promises: 'John Byrne takes the fabulous F.F.—BACK TO THE BASICS!" Witness more than a few recent letters pages which enthusiastically proclaim, "Wow! Ish **#** [fill in the blank] was just like a comic from the 1960 s!" For better or worse, the product of yesterday is on the menu for today. It is not the **only** item on the menu, of course—but it is in danger of becoming the specialty of the house.

There are two basic methods that the comics companies use to recapture the style of their "bet-

"... I WAS STROLLING ALONG THE RIVERFRONT WHEN I HEARD A CALL FOR HELP FROM THE NEARBY DOCKS..."
HELP!
SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE'S IN TROUBLE!
EXTRA! SPECIAL DOUBLE-PAGE PIN-UP!
PLUS: FIRESTORM
THE FLASH
60¢
NO. 302
OCT.
THE SCARLET SPEEDSTER HAS VOWED TO CAPTURE THE GOLDEN GLIDER!
THE FASTEST MAN ALIVE!
BUT BARRY THE ONE WHO'S CAPTURED HIS HEART!
SEE THE FILM
©1981 DC Comics

Is Carmine Infantino's return to *THE FLASH* a sign of 1960s nostalgia?

ter" days. The first, and most obvious, is the **RECYCLED CREATORS** method, exemplified by Carmine Infantino's current work on **THE FLASH.** The second method, more difficult to accomplish but ultimately more rewarding to both the readers and the comics industry, is to present **RECYCLED** (or re-vamped) **CONCEPTS.**

RECYCLED CREATORS: The current Bates/Infantino **FLASH** is in flat contradiction to the old saying, "You can't go home again." Cary Bates began his comics career in the late sixties, working first under Mort Weisinger and then under Mort's old crony, Julius Schwartz. He's certainly learned his craft well . . . Bates has been writing 1960 s-style comics all through the 1970 s, and no one can accuse him of cynically jumping on a bandwagon. If anything, he's been the wagon's caretaker during the past decade. Still Bates' scripting alone was not enough to keep The Flash hale and hearty. Artistically, the book had been marking time at best since Infantino's departure in 1967. Thankfully, Infantino has returned, and while I might quibble about DC's choice of inkers for charmin' Carmine [I'd argue that he needs someone who'll smooth out his excessive angluarity, as Murphy Anderson, Joe Giella, and Sid Greene did in the 1960s], I'll never argue about the finished product. Methinks Master Infantino would look good if he were inked by an orangutan. [In fact, **he** might even prefer it if such **were** the case!]

Cary Bates' other regular scripting assignments, **"Superman"** and **"Superboy,"** also qualify for the Recycled Creators category—but in this case, the creators in question never really left! Curt Swan has been the definitive Superman artist since sometime in the 1950 s. I'll never understand how he's been able to keep the same job for so long without getting bored—but I'm certainly not complaining! Swan's longevity is an object lesson to the new breed of artists who cannot seem to keep the same assignment for an entire year, as well as an indication of the man's total professionalism. Keep it up, Curt! You may not get as much space in the fan press as the latest ninety-day wonder, but we love ya just the same!

Kurt Schaffenberger's work on **SUPERBOY** would be enough to qualify this book for our 1960 s nostalgia list on its own—remember his gorgeous work on **LOIS LANE** way back when?—but the feature's current time-frame, the early 1960 s, puts it all alone in its own sub-category. I hate to carp on minor points when a book is as well-done as this one, but . . . "Our" Superman lives on Earth-1, right? These are the adventures of the Earth-1 Superboy, right? How, then, are we to reconcile these stories with those of the Weisinger-era Superman [also located on Earth-1] who was shown to be a contemporary of John F. Kennedy? Additionally, the prospect of seeing Superboy dealing with campus riots and the drug culture [two inescapable facets of life in the later 1960 s] does not at all appeal to me. It will not be a pretty sight, folks.

The Superman family also holds a large portion of irony in the Recycled Creators department. **"The Legion of Super-Heroes"** was strongly influenced

by the scripts of Jim Shooter in the 1960s. Now, Roy Thomas [who also broke into the comics field in the 1960 s, working briefly for Mort Weisinger before he landed a position at Marvel] has written **"The Legion,"** just as Jim Shooter has taken over Roy's old job as Editor-in-Chief of Marvel. Coincidences like this are acceptable only in the wild, wacky, wonderful world of comic books, thank Crom.

Which brings us to the hallowed halls of Marvel. Unfortunately, the Sons of Stan haven't quite got the same sort of strength in the Returning Personnel category. They **do** use their people in interesting ways, though, **SPIDER-MAN** being a good case in point. Denny O'Neil, who served a brief stint in the Bullpen before re-defining the "Sixties Comic" with **GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW** , had until recently brought the element of surprise back into the adventures of our friendly neighborhood web-slinger. Peter Parker's pals & gals have actually gotten to be interesting again, and O'Neil's stint as editor of **MARVEL TEAM-UP** and **PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR ETCETERA** ensured coherency in the Spider-Line.

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF
SUPERBOY
50¢
NO. 9
SEPT.
TRY ALL YOU LIKE TO BREAK THROUGH OUR PHANTOM ZONE DARKNESS, SUPERBOY...
...WE'VE CUT YOU OFF FROM YOUR PARENTS FOREVER!
To Richard Howell— a true-blue Comics Fan. Best Wishes
SPECIAL! SUPERBOY'S SECRET DIARY!
©1981 DC Comics
Schaffenberger

The Bates-Schaffenberger *SUPERBOY* is a particular favorite with fans of 1960s DCs.

Gene Colan is another prominent figure in Marvel's return to the 1960s. Prior to his move to DC, he just finished a relatively-long engagement on **DOCTOR STRANGE**, and recently had become the regular penciller of **THE AVENGERS**, qualifying him as a three-way returnee—Gene drew **IRON MAN** from 1966-68, **CAPTAIN AMERICA** in 1969-72, and **THE AVENGERS** in 1969. Other welcome artistic returnees include Chic Stone, who brings a touch of bygone glory to the pages of **THOR** and **MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE**, and Joe Sinnott, who is currently busy keeping the **DEFENDERS** squarely in the Marvel Universe no matter **how** bizarre the situation gets. Sal Buscema's work on **THE HULK** cannot be overlooked—Sal's first work for Marvel, including inks for Herb Trimpe's Hulk, came in 1969. However, the most notable name on Marvel's list of sixties survivors is undoubtedly that of Steve Ditko. Although Ditko has wisely ruled out working on Spider-Man or Dr. Strange, preferring not to reprise his earlier efforts, he has lent his distinctive touch to **MACHINE MAN**, a few **HULK** and **DAREDEVIL** fill-ins, a **MICRONAUTS** annual, and **"Captain Universe."** The good Captain is an important figure in the next category as well, making this as good a place as any to introduce

RECYCLED CONCEPTS: There are nearly as many different ways to recycle a concept as there are concepts worth recycling. Bringing, for instance, The Fantastic Four "back to basics" is the first and most obvious fashion of recycling your basic concept. This approach is characterized by the belief that the proper style for any given comic book was either forgotten or abandoned at one point or another in the past, and that the best way to recapture lost popularity is to approximate the content of whichever era the current creators remember most fondly. Most practitioners of this method were themselves fans in the 1960s, so their efforts are understandable and perhaps even laudable ...but they may prove to be mining an exhausted vein. The current runs of **GREEN LANTERN, JUSTICE LEAGUE,** and sections of **WORLD'S FINEST** display this technique; and the re-appearances of **"Bat Lash," "Enemy Ace," "The War That Time Forgot,"** and **"Tales of Asgard"** are indications of this trend gathering momentum.

Unfortunately, these efforts are often flawed by their very purpose. The writers and artists are content to reproduce the particulars of the remembered series—villains, minor heroes, plot devices and stock situations—but generally fail to realize the importance of adapting and updating the material with which they work. In my opinion, this is a serious omission. Julius Schwartz did not alter The Flash, Green Lantern, The Atom, and the rest simply because it suited his ego. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby did not revamp The Human Torch, Sub-Mariner, and Captain America because they had forgotten the manner in

which they were **supposed** to be handled.

A far more viable attitude, it seems to me, would be to examine a character's past—his motivatons, quirks, and general tendencies—and then to advance the character, as slowly and subtly as possible, into a series of unprecedented actions that, taken **en toto**, restate that character's basic theme. This tack has been taken in the current runs of **CAPTAIN AMERICA, IRON MAN** [most notably in Tony Stark's bout with alcoholism], and **DAREDEVIL**, invariably to popular acclaim. It is also evident in the recent reunion of Batman and Robin.

Another important development in the comics industry's attempt to re-live the 1960s is Marvel's acquisition of the rights to do both **STAR TREK** and **JAMES BOND** comic books. **STAR TREK**, a 1960s phenomenon in its own right, has existed in comic book form since the days of its initial run on the NBC television network... but Joe Average Fan's remarkable disregard for anything not either DC or Marvel in origin renders Gold Key's handling of the title effectively null and void. James Bond, of course, was the progenitor of the espionage craze of the 1960s, spawning a legion of imitators [cinematic and otherwise] that included **NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.** and the **T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS**, and establishing a genre that was explored to fine effect in Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy's tenure on **MASTER OF KUNG FU**. It remains to be seen how well 007 will fare as a code-approved comic book. Clive Reston's alleged sire is in capable hands, no matter what new indignities Roger Moore may inflict upon the character.

There is such as thing as **too much** revamping, of course—Cubby Broccoli's satirical handling of 007 is a good example [one sometimes gets the impression that Broccoli has been given a License to Kill a Once-Vital Character]—but I don't think comic books have reached that point just yet. Most major revisions in the comic book field have worked to some good. Take, for example, The New X-Men: Sales problems? Just invent a whole new team—

THE LAST THING WE NEED RIGHT NOW IS MORE POWER, HIGH-JACK THE NEXT SPACE SHUTTLE AND FLY IT PLANET-SIDE
IN SHORT, WE'RE TRYING TO CALM MAN DOWN!
MAYBE SO, BUT EXTRA HELP AND EXPERIENCE COULDN'T HURT ANYTHING!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

FANTASTIC FOUR is currently undergoing a "back-to-the-1960s" revampment.

HURRY! THESE CREATURES MAY LOOK STUPID, BUT THEY'RE NOT!
I DUNNO. ABOUT THAT, BATMAN.
THIS ONE'S HEAD SOUNDS HOLLOW!
©1981 DC Comics

Robin rejoins Batman: after a decade-long solo stint, the partner rejoins his mentor of earlier days.

out goes the bad air, in comes the good—and the book is more popular than it ever was before. **THE NEW TEEN TITANS** is an obvious attempt to travel the same road, and **"Dial 'H' for Hero"** is a combination of this approach with Katy Keene's "design it yourself" **schtick**. Both are far more interesting to this reviewer in their present incarnations than they were in their original 1960s formats.

But, to my mind, the most fascinating marriage of 1960s concept and present-day execution is Mantlo & Ditko's **"Captain Universe."** "The hero who could be you" is, in essence, the Spider-Man premise taken to an illogical extreme; and like any extreme statement, it holds an energy that may not necessarily be appreciated, but cannot possibly be ignored. Mantlo joyously exploited Ditko's 1960s credentials with **"Double Jeopardy"** and **"Claws Of The Cat/The Big Time"** [**MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #10 & 11**], the first story being highly reminiscent of Ditko's short-lived DC series, **THE HAWK AND THE DOVE**, and the second containing several pointed references to Ditko's work on **SPIDER-MAN**. It was just like old home week...

Unfortunately, the old homestead has gotten rather dusty over the years. Some folks don't really care about that sort of thing, though, and a crowd of 1960s squatters have taken over the premises. They may not have been on the scene when the house was first constructed, but damned if they ain't a'climbin' in the rafters today. Still, I can't really object if they'd rather take shelter in an old house than build a new one out of scratch. With this thought in mind, I'd like to mention a few 1960s-style pitfalls which might best be avoided. It is better to repair a hole in the floor than to gripe when you fall through it a second time.

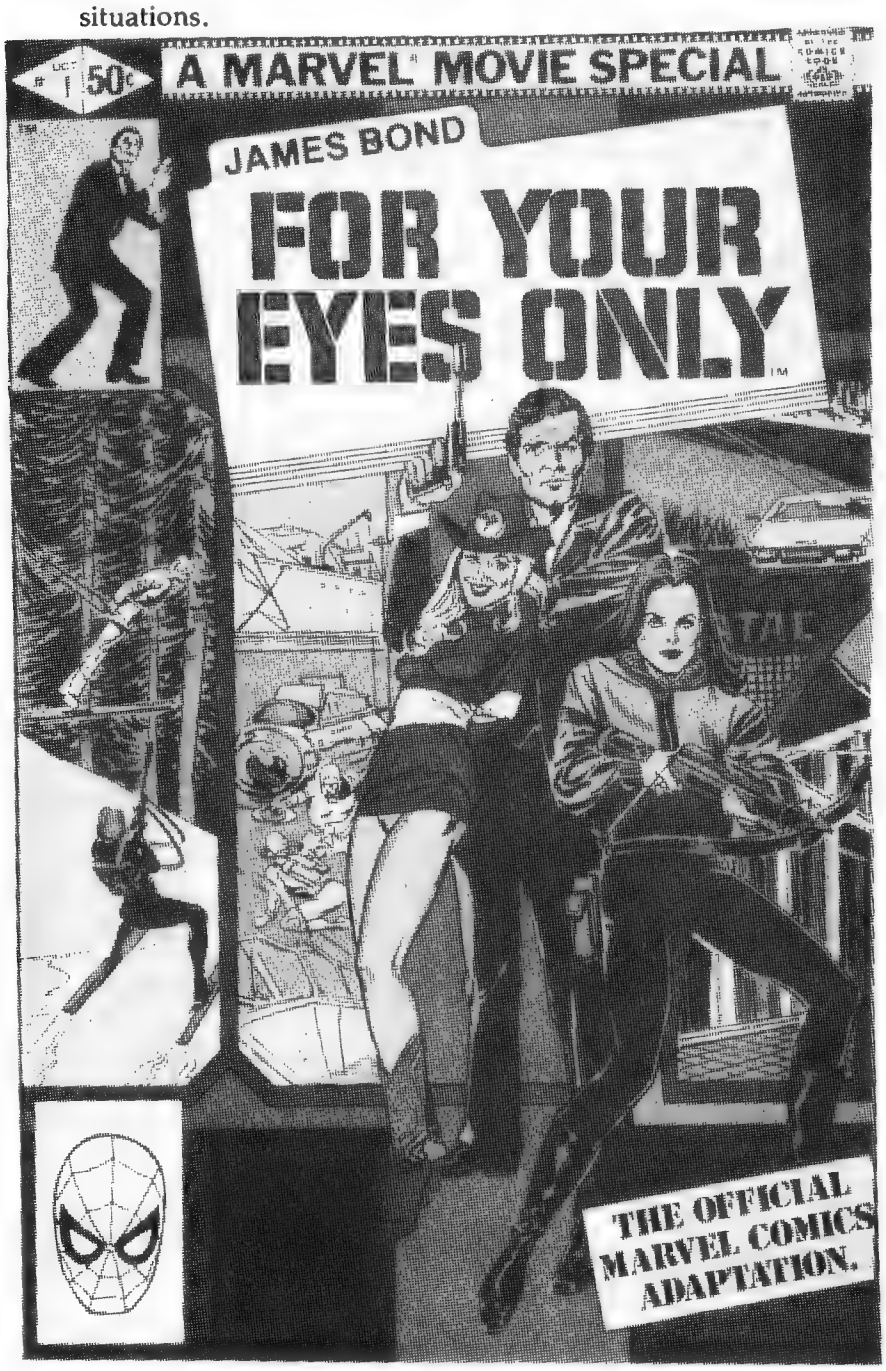
I. Don't climb on bandwagons. Remember camp? Fads may come and fads may go, but the printed page is around to embarrass us long afterwards. Remember relevance? To over-use **any** style, no matter how effective or how popular, is to subject it to eventual public disfavor. I don't want to find myself saying, "Remember the 1960s revival?" in the year 2000.

II. Beware of overly-rapid expansion and be on the lookout for its partner, sudden cancellation. Remember the dozens of different comics groups that expired in the 1960s? Remember how the boom and the bust of the underground comic occurred in a few short years? Remember the artistic missteps that Marvel took as a result of their own poorly-planned expansion in the late 1960s? And say a silent prayer for the fan press. Here's hoping we haven't over-calculated the size of our potential audience.

III. Resist divisiveness at all costs. Remember that Nixon's victory over the anti-war forces was accomplished by the use of inside agents employing divide-and-conquer techniques. Childish back-biting and petty squabbles are unbecoming in those who consider themselves to be professionals. Remember how distasteful the "Brand Ecch"/"Brand I" feud was? The Shooter vs. Wein, Wolfman, and Thomas debacle is entirely too venomous; and the Fleisher vs. Ellison and **THE COMICS JOURNAL** free-for-all should never have reached the legal arena. Now it's all in the laps of the lawyers—and when they play the game, they're ususally the only ones who win. Remember, above all, that the myth of the "one-for-all-and-all-for-one" Marvel Bullpen is probably the primary reason so many fans of the 1960s grew up wanting to emulate the product of those times. Here's hoping that the creators of tomorrow find something worth emulating in today's product.

Here's hoping that someone eventually gives them a "comic of the 1980s" that they might emulate.

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY is a movie that came out in the 1980s, but the character—James Bond—has been around (in film) since the early 1960s. Much of his appeal comes from the parodic elements dealing with Cold War-like situations.



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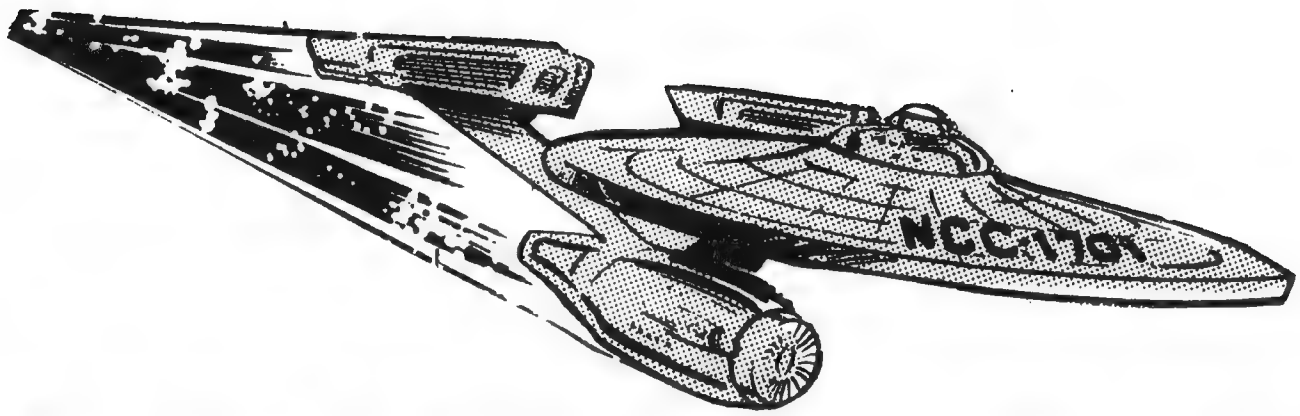

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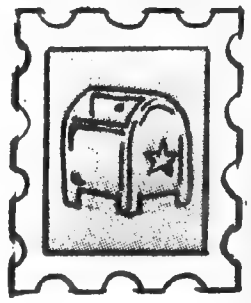
Mark Evanier has written everything from *PINK LADY & JEFF* to Marvel's fine Hanna-Barbera comics. He is currently working as a Consulting Editor to NMP's graphic magazine line.



WHAT IT WAS WAS FANDOM

That this article even had to be written should tell you something. You can decide just what a little later.

There was a comic strip—a **DOONESBURY**, I believe—about a rich kid who had heard that stamp collecting was fun and had decided that such a past-time might fill some nebulous void in his life. In the strip, he picked up a phone, called a store and said, "Send me all the stamps of Brazil." As he hung up, he said, as I recall, "Gee, this **is** fun."

That's about how fans buy comic books these days. When I was in my teens [I was 29 last Monday, so you can figure out when that was], it wasn't so simple. New comic books were distributed on Tuesdays and Thursdays in most areas, along with all the other magazines. If you expected to maintain any semblance of a collection, you hit at least one newsstand on each of those days. If you were a true comics bibliophile, you knew every store/stand/market that carried comics for a five-mile radius and you knew the approximate time they put the new ones on display.

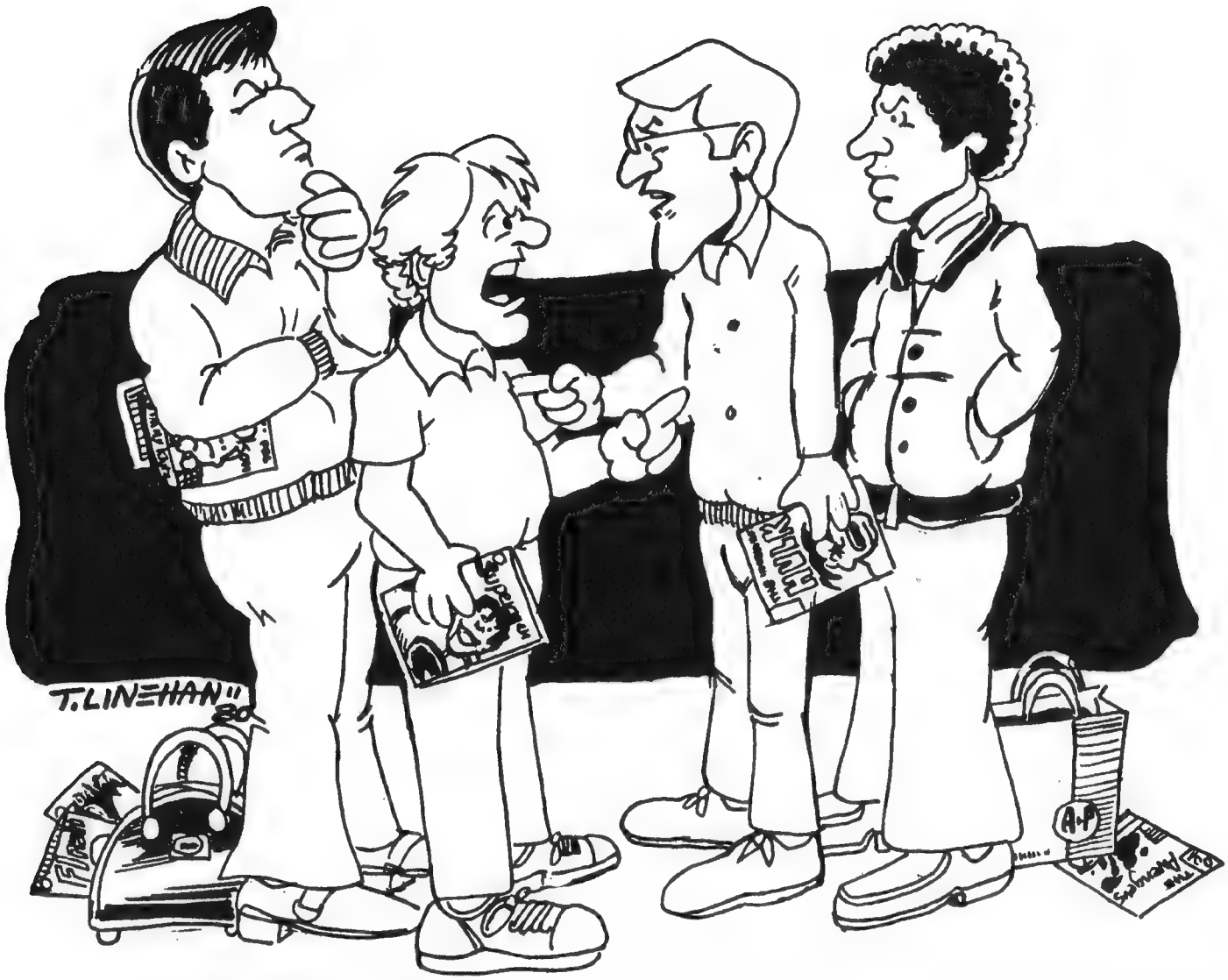
When I was attending Westwood Elementary, I only had to walk three blocks out of my way, **en route** home. There was a drugstore called Parnin's which, like most Southern California drugstores, sold everything **but** drugs. Out here, if you need a prescription filled, you don't go to a druggist; you go to a high school kid. Anyway, I'd hit Parnin's about 3:15 and, if God and The Cashier were smiling upon me, there'd be the new issue of **SUPERSOMETHING. JUSTICE LEAGUE,** maybe, or **WORLD'S FINEST**. That was if I was lucky. If not, the treasured books could be seen, secreted—almost teasingly—in a wired bale of periodicals over by the cash register.

Now, if you were like me, you didn't want to get pushy. Especially over **comic books.** So you'd linger about the store, examining the rack of comics you already had, for minutes that seemed like hours. What you hoped was that the storekeeper would notice you there and go, "Omigod! I forgot to put the new comics out," and then hasten to do so. That's what you hoped but it never quite went that way. So you'd wait and wait...because you damn well weren't going home empty-handed. Eventually, they'd open the bundle just to get rid of you and you'd snatch up the new **FLASH** and plunk down your—are you ready for this?—**twelve cents** for it. That's right: Twelve cents. You could buy eight of those suckers for a buck and still have change left over for four pieces of Fleer Dubble Bubble.

[Why do I suddenly feel so **old**, all of a sudden?]

That was how we got the DC comics. Now, the Marvels...the Marvels were more of a problem. This was back in 1963 when Marvel had fewer than a dozen titles, all of them written by Stan Lee and drawn by Jack Kirby, Don Heck, Steve Ditko, and/or Dick Ayers. They were all pretty good—good enough that you bought them all, if and when you could find them. In later years, I heard people at Marvel complain about poor distribution hurting their sales. It was to laugh. No way in Hell could their distribution ever be any worse than it was out here in 1963. The books came out—or they didn't come out—usually in one lump. They kind of loitered at the local distributorship until a week when Saturday Evening Post was a shade on the thin side; then, the maladroits who packed them would slip them into those wire bundles and truck them off to Parnin's and elsewhere. Those stores were the only places you could buy comic books, unless you got them by subscription—which you didn't because, for God's sake, they came **folded!**

[N.B.: Parnin's isn't there anymore, you might as well know. About the time I went off to Emerson



Junior High School—and was therefore closer to Kirk Drugs—its **raison d'etre** was no more. It gave way to the 1960s in a big way and became a self-serve Granola Emporium.]

There were no other places to buy comics because the comic book specialty shops, such as are now turning up like roaches in an Armenian restaurant, were relatively new. And, anyway, they only sold old funnybooks, anyway. I was lucky; I obtained the key issues for my collection before any of this. I started amassing super-hero comics around 1962 and such stores as did bother with comic books never, ever charged more than a nickel each, six-for-a-quarter. I hit every old book shop in town and, at the aforesaid price, managed to pick up all the early issues of things like **JUSTICE LEAGUE** and **GREEN LANTERN.** I filled in my runs of **SUPERMAN** and **BATMAN** back to around 1957 and, in some cases, earlier. All for five cents each.

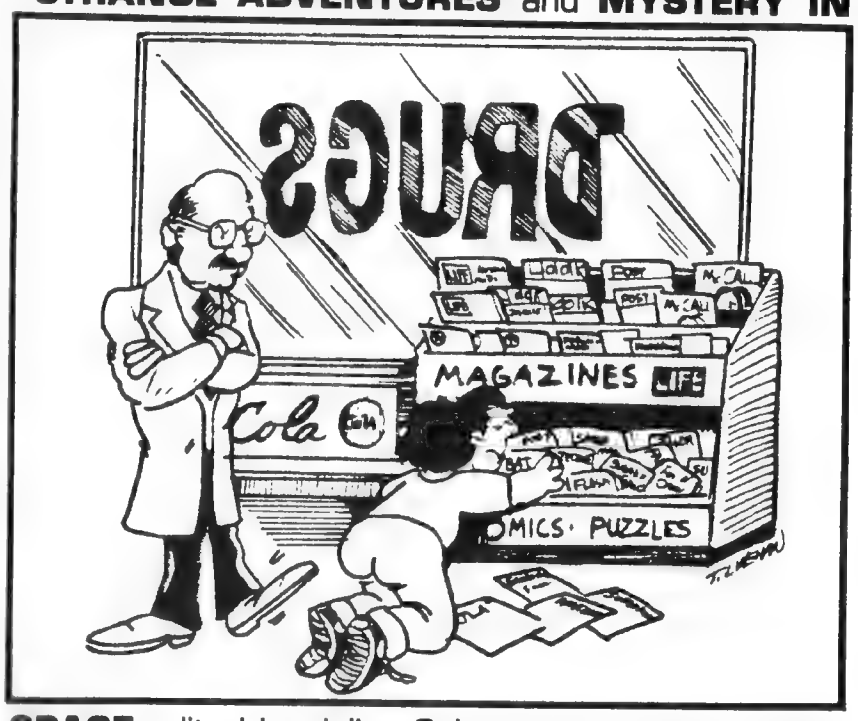
I didn't carry a list with me. I knew exactly which books I had. I never accidentally bought a duplicate.

My timing was impeccable: About the time I satiated my immediate urges for comics and filled in my collections of such books as were available, the boom hit. Stores started opening up that charged high prices for vintage funnybooks ["Golden Age," they called it]. You knew as each store opened because, about once a week in some magazine or newspaper, you'd always find some gosh-wow article about how there was this store, see, and it was selling—can you believe it?—old comic books and people actually were paying honest-to-goodness cash for them!!! I never took well to those articles, for they had several questionable results. For one, non-fans who read them began assuming that my burgeoning comic book collection [then about five thousand strong] was some sort of investment. You couldn't convince these people that you liked the **content** of the comics, but the **money** they understood. Then there was the matter of old comic book prices. Comic book dealers have never been averse to exaggeration, so, for the sake of a good story, they'd tell reporters that they were charging fifty dollars for a copy of **SUPERMAN #1**. It made for good copy ["Ten cent comic book sells for fifty dollars!"] but, at the time, all us collectors were passing up copies for half that. Naturally, as soon as the article appeared, every dealer around would immediately jack his price up to fifty—and begin telling reporters that they were getting one hundred. The self-fulfilling overstatement at work.

[Yet another aside: I always thought that a sound financial bit of chicanery would be to buy up, say, five copies of some comic book that is currently selling for, say, a thousand dollars a copy. Then you call up U.P.I. or some news organization and say you've just paid a record price for a copy of an old comic book. It makes such good copy that they'd probably

run the item. You say you paid five grand for one copy and they print it. Suddenly, for all intents and purposes, the price for one of them **becomes** five thousand dollars as all the dealers raise their prices to match this reported record sale. And you've made a tidy profit. I'd be very surprised if this hasn't been done—especially with this much premeditation.]

I never let rising comic prices stop me from increasing my collection. What I had to do was to widen my tastes a bit. While the prices of super-hero comics were soaring higher than Giant-Man with a thyroid condition, the prices of everything else remained low. No demand. So I quietly discovered DC war comics and the old issues of **STRANGE ADVENTURES** and **MYSTERY IN**



SPACE edited by Julius Schwartz. I began collecting the ACG books like **ADVENTURES INTO THE UNKNOWN** and old Atlas comics. Pre-super-hero Marvels like **TALES OF SUSPENSE** went for fifty cents or so since they'd continued numbering into the super-hero books, but you could pick up the old Atlas/Marvel mystery books for a dime each. Fandom cared about super-heroes, super-heroes, and only super-heroes. In that order.

The dealers caught on but not for a while. As late as 1969, I was still buying high quality comics for five cents. There's a store up on Wilcox in the heart of Hollywood called Bond Street Book Shop. I was there the first week it opened and I spent a then-extravagant fifteen dollars on nickel comics—mostly mystery and war books. I am quite certain that the first ten issues of **TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED** were among the unwieldy pile that I hauled home. So were several of the ACG mystery comics for which dealers now charge fortunes, under the delusion that they contain art by Frank Frazetta. And buyers cough it up because one thing which has never changed about fandom is how inept dealers and fans are about identifying artists.

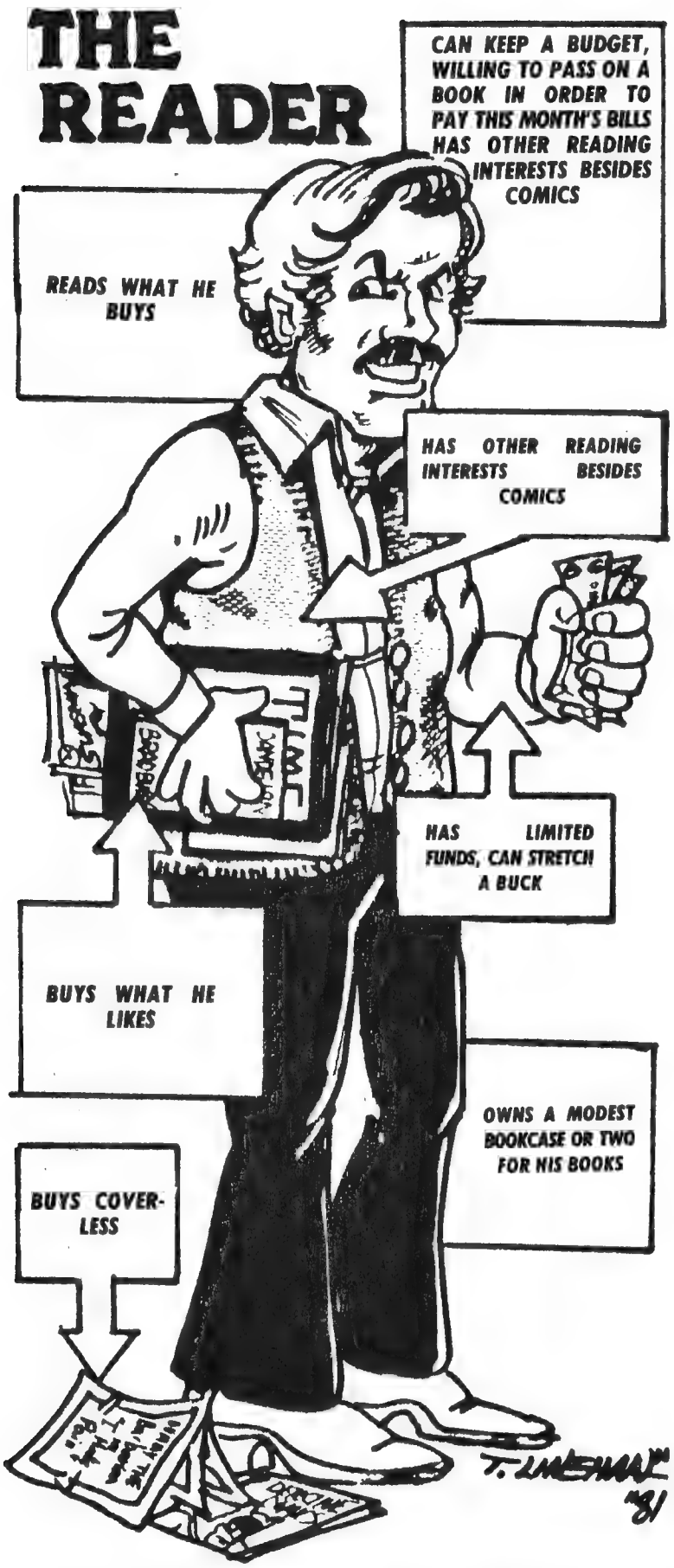
They sold super-hero comics at Bond Street that first week, too, only I bought none of them. They were up at the front counter; that's where the crowds were and that's where the higher prices were. But that's not where I was. I've always tried, in reading comics, to keep my tastes broad; to appreciate **any** good comic, even if—in fact, **especially if**—other fans were writing it off as junk. You'd be surprised how many fine comics get by-passed by fandom at large. I wish my tastes had been even broader at the time; There were tons of vintage Disney comics there, too, at a nickel per and nobody—not even me—wanted any part of that "kiddy stuff." You could have put together one helluva Carl Barks collection back then for petty cash.

It's harder and harder to find the undiscovered cheap treasures these days; not impossible, mind you, but difficult. For one thing, fandom's tastes began broadening. For another, dealers began to mark up any old comics, regardless of demand or interest. It doesn't matter that no one wants a certain old book at three bucks and that it's been in a dealer's stock at that price for two years. Most dealers know zip about supply and demand and, if the **PRICE GUIDE** at all supports what they're asking, they'd sooner run their children through a Cuisinart than lower a price.

That's part of why fandom is no fun these days. It's too much a business and too little a hobby. My friend Joe Brancatelli says, "The speculators are stealing our heritage" and he's quite right. Comic book history is more and more coming to rest in the vaults of those who would salt the old books away like Kruggerands with an equal interest in their content.

I knew how it had all atrophied but I didn't begin getting angry about it [or as angry as I ever get] until an incident at a one day convention a few months ago. The first Sunday of every month, they have a little mini-con in downtown L.A., and I can often be found there, thumbing through bins of the cheap comics—the kind dealers don't bring to a convention at which the tables cost a small fortune each. I was doing just this when I saw a gent in his mid-thirties stride up to the dealer at hand. It didn't take Saturn Girl to see that the gent had never been to a comic book convention before. "I'd like to buy a comic book—around a hundred dollars," he said, whipping just that amount from his billfold. "Something I can put away as an investment."

I was surprised but the dealer wasn't. He'd apparently dealt with such folks before—and he knew just how to talk to them. He pulled a theoretically-mint condition copy of **X-MEN #1** off a display behind his table. "Now, this is one that's really going up. It was seventy dollars this time last year. And it's drawn by Jack Kirby. He's the guy who did The Fantastic Four and Captain America. You can look around and see how the other dealers have it priced


THE READER
CAN KEEP A BUDGET, WILLING TO PASS ON A BOOK IN ORDER TO PAY THIS MONTH'S BILLS HAS OTHER READING INTERESTS BESIDES COMICS
READS WHAT HE BUYS
HAS OTHER READING INTERESTS BESIDES COMICS
HAS LIMITED FUNDS, CAN STRETCH A BUCK
BUYS WHAT HE LIKES
OWNS A MODEST BOOKCASE OR TWO FOR HIS BOOKS
BUYS COVER-LESS

or check here in the **PRICE GUIDE.** A hundred dollars for this is really a good investment."

"I see," said the Speculator, inspecting the comic—not for any interest in its art or story or characters, but for nicks, pencil markings, or any smidgen of a defect that might mar its resale value. This book, obviously, was never to be read. At least, not by him.

I didn't see if they consummated the deal. I didn't care. I moved about the Dealer's Room, recalling a rumor I'd heard now and again; that there were a number of investors, much like the gent I'd just seen, who had, years ago, bought up all the copies of **SUPERMAN #1, BATMAN #1**, and **DETECTIVE #27** and the like. They had, the story went, squirreled them away in safe-deposit boxes with the understanding that they'd just sit on them while they appreciated, eventually to be leaked selectively on the market when their value had multiplied many times over. I'd never put much stock into that story but it does make financial sense and, what's more, most of those rare issues—once so abundant at conventions and in book stores—are now nearly impossible to find. **Somebody** has them.

I knew that this kind of speculation went on but, somehow, the **X-MEN #1** incident stuck with me. You know how it is: Sometimes, a single event registers Big with you because it so well epitomizes what's been rankling at you.

That was the first blow; the next came a few weeks later.

I moved a little over a year ago into a house large enough to hold everything I owned. My last apartment wasn't. I had most of my comic books there but not all. The rest were in my parents' garage, along with twenty or so cases of...Stuff. Over Christmas vacation, I got enough things finally put away here that I was able to bring over the other comics and Stuff. The comics were things like Marvel reprint books, multiple copies of comics I'd written, foreign comics, strange off-brands of funny animal books, and so forth. The Stuff consisted of old correspondence, boxes of comic-book-related toys and games and, for the most part, old fanzines.

Let me tell you about old fanzines. I put books and magazines away the way most of us put books and magazines away. I read everything as I put it away. Finding all those old 'zines was like seeing my life flash before me, much of it directed by the guy who did **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**. I found embarrassments, trivialities, inanities, the occasional triumph, and, most important, a reminder of when folks published fanzines for fun. There's that word again: Fun. What does he mean, **fun?**

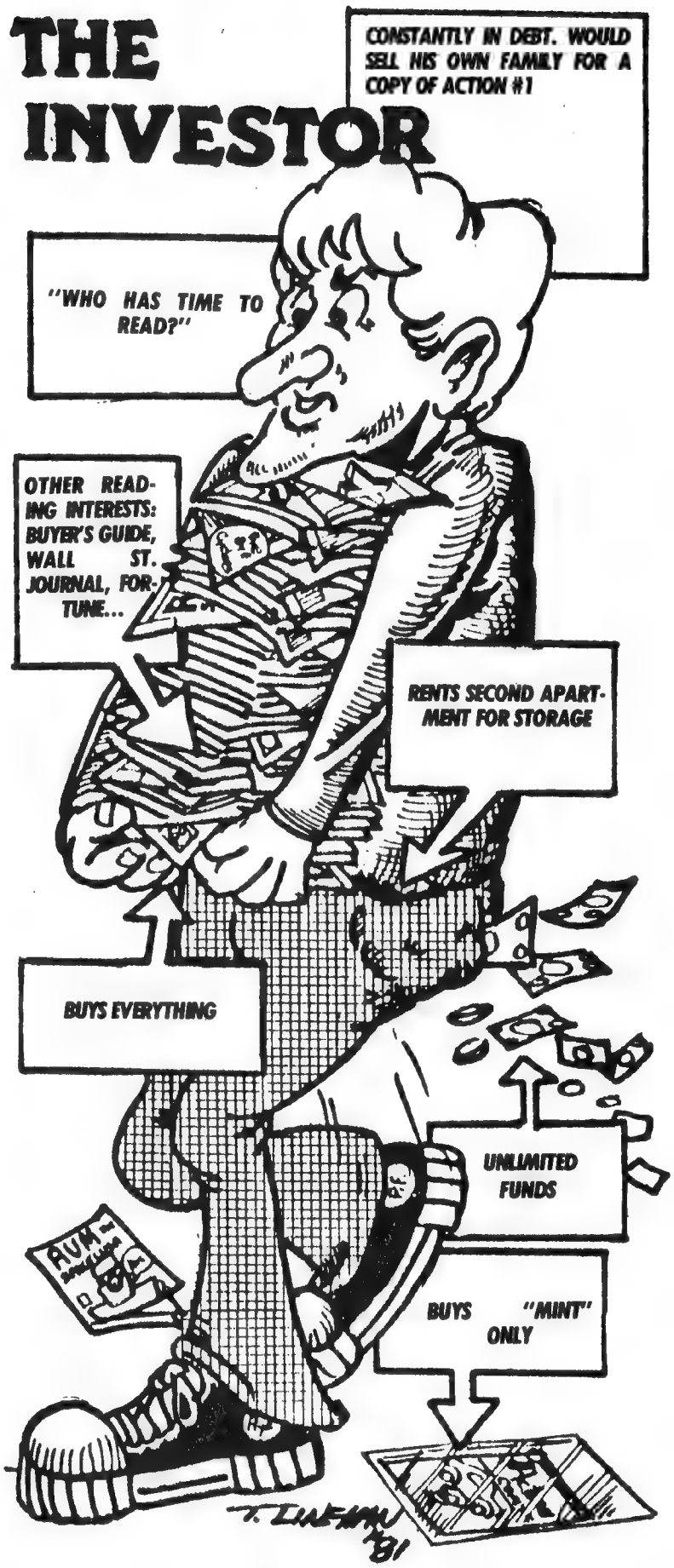
Fun was when you got so caught up in comics that you wanted to communicate with others of like interest. Just reading them wasn't enough. You wanted to get somehow more intimate with them, to talk about them, analyze them, find out all about them and, of course, complete your collections—not for profit, but because you liked the damn things.

A fanzine of the type I'm describing had a circulation of sometimes less than one hundred, rarely more than five hundred. They were printed by ditto, mimeograph, hectograph, sometimes offset... whatever one had access to. There was even one—circulation twenty-five—that the Publisher/Editor/Head Writer [all one guy] reproduced by

retyping each page five times, using five sheets of carbon paper. That's how badly he wanted to have a fanzine. And it was all utterly noncommercial. A Publisher sent his 'zine to anyone who'd send him a copy of **their** zine—or even to anyone who'd promised to write a Letter of Comment. Budgets were minuscule, though still usually a heavy expenditure for a Publisher who was going to high school and trying to maintain a comic book collection. The great thing about fanzines then was that anyone could start one for the price of a little printing and a few ads in the larger fanzines. And you could write anything, draw anything, say anything in your fanzine—absolute free expression. Most folks tried writing and drawing comic book stories in emulation of their favorite DC, Marvel, or other newsstand comics. Some wrote text stories [Marv Wolfman—now one of the top comic book writers—published a dittoed fanzine wherein he printed the first published fiction by Steven King, now a top author; I found my copy amidst The Stuff.] Some wrote scholarly articles on the history of comics past. And some of us [this was my specialty] wrote critiques and reviews of the current offerings.

Some 'zines specialized. There were adzines and stripzines and gabzines devoted to a particular character or company. Back in this Stone Age I'm describing, there was a far greater difference between a DC and a Marvel book than there now seems to exist. In fact, some think that there is now less difference between a DC and a Marvel comic than there then was between a DC comic edited by one of their [then] seven editors and a DC comic edited by any other of their seven editors.

In 1966, there were factions in comics fandom. Marvel fans and DC fans were not unlike the Montagues and Capulets. No, worse: Hatfields and McCoys. A lot of us read both but there were those who pledged devout allegiance to one or the other and it certainly made for colorful debates and 'zines. Since Marvel was the small company with but a dozen titles, they had the most devotees among those who took their funnybooks seriously. This was back before Marvel was claiming to be the biggest in the business; when, in fact, they were fiercely claiming to be just the opposite. There sprung up a phalanx of Marvel 'zines that were nothing if not devoted. I got a complimentary copy in the mail once after I had a letter published in a Marvel comic book. The mimeoed cover letter said, "We have reason to believe you are one of us...you appreciate the masterworks of Marvel Comics and we're sure you want to join our club and subscribe to our magazine." At least, it said **something** like that. The attendant mag, also mimeographed, was filled with articles about how great each and every Marvel comic book was. They had an Inquiring Reporter kind of column called, "Why Would Anyone Read DC?" The Inquirer asked the


THE INVESTOR
CONSTANTLY IN DEBT. WOULD SELL HIS OWN FAMILY FOR A COPY OF ACTION #1
"WHO HAS TIME TO READ?"
OTHER READING INTERESTS: BUYER'S GUIDE, WALL ST. JOURNAL, FORTUNE...
RENTS SECOND APARTMENT FOR STORAGE
BUYS EVERYTHING
UNLIMITED FUNDS
BUYS "MINT" ONLY
RUN
T. LUTHAN '81

Inquirees—at various newsstands, I suppose—and transcribed [and ridiculed] their responses. There was a single-minded fundamentalism about the Marvel 'zines that perturbed me. I wrote a few articles for them and then heard nothing for months. From the 'zines, that is. In short order, I began getting hate mail from their members/readers. My articles had been of the mind that one shouldn't write off the entire DC product merely because **JIMMY OLSEN** was a tad on the sappy side [or seemed so to us sixteen-year-olds fighting to assert some

semblance of maturity in such an ignominous hobby]. My articles were either interpreted as—or in some cases rewritten by—the zine editors into pieces about how Marvel stunk, DC was great, nyah, nyah, nyah. Lord, how the Marvel fans loved having an enemy against which to unite. One 'zine even wrote some completely spurious "Evanier" articles and then had a ball, for issues after, rebutting "me." I managed to eventually straighten all that out but even then it didn't sour me on fandom; that's how much fun it all was.

I used to think there was something terribly, terribly wrong about the Marvelzine's fanaticism. I still do. For a time, it looked like we were outgrowing that kind of mania, but lately, I fear, the pendulum's swung back, even farther than before.

Look: Each of us who reads there things, these little four-color periodicals, has something in common. We have comics in common.

Now, I'm not talking to those of you whose interest in comics is primarily financial. Nothing personal, but you folks I could live without. And it takes no particular guts on my part to say that because I rather doubt any of you have read this far anyway.

Rather, I'm talking to those of you who like comics. Maybe not all comics, maybe not most comics—maybe not even a single comic book currently being published. I look around conventions and I see a lot of folks who don't read anything currently being published—and haven't, for years. Some of them, I guess, are there because they're biding their time, revelling in the past and waiting, if not for Godot, then at least for comics to get—for them—good again. Some of them are there because they've come to get more out of the institution of Fandom than they ever got from the comics. I even lump these folks in with the ones who like comics. Their motivations, however personal, are surely supportive of the passion that I find in sad absentia these days.

But all these people—at least in some way—like the **idea** of comics; they've seen them as something more than a phase you go through at age eight or nine and chuck by age twelve because it seems babyish. They're attracted to the fantasy—to this weird synthesis of words and pictures which, when the coordination is just so between those two elements, can produce magic.

I learned to read from comics—and I kept on reading them. I can't recall a time when I didn't own more comic books than any other kid for miles around. There's another basic common experience among us all: We save the things. It isn't enough to read them and then discard them. Most of us would sooner sell our lymph glands to a perfume factory than part with our only copy of a treasured book. When I was eight, I had a huge box of comics—mostly funny animal in nature. If there was such a thing as fandom anywhere, it was utterly alien to me. But, one day, I started filing my comics. I don't know why I did it—but I did it. I put the Warner Brothers comics in one stack, the Walter Lantz ones in another, the Disneys in another, and so on. Then I broke each stack down further—the Lantz stack into individual piles of Woody Woodpecker, Andy Panda, Chilly Willy, TV Funnies, Space Mouse, annuals, and so on. Then I put each stack of each title in numerical order—which was tough because a lot of them were Dells and Dells didn't have the numbers on the cover most of the time. But I did it. I didn't know if anyone in the history of mankind had ever put comic books in numerical sequence before. I had no idea that it would become S.O.P. for myself and countless fans in years to come. But I did it because those books were important to me and they deserved to be treated with respect.

What you have here is your basic Primal Fandom Response.

And I kinda knew back then that, one day, when I had space enough to house them all, I'd have shelves of comic books, all nicely catalogued and arranged so I could locate any issue in the time it took to say, "Jiminy Cricket."

Other kids I knew liked comics but not the way I did. They read them, true, but they didn't care enough about them to put them in order.

So I had others to share my hobby with, sort of. Now why, we might as well examine here, was that so important? I'll not only pose the question; I'll answer it as well. When you're a kid, your world is small. You're small, but your world is always smaller when you're young. You're always growing faster than it does. I was, in many ways, a mature kid for my age. I have a hunch you were, too. You lived in two worlds: Yours and Theirs. Theirs was the

Adults' world, complete with Adult rules, Adult control, and Adult expectations of the way you, as a non-Adult, were expected to function. If you're the slightest bit mature, that world can be excruciating at times.

And then there was Your world, the one you retreated into when you climbed the tree, crawled into the clubhouse, or just plain slammed the door to your room. It was a world you shared with your friends. Parents were not only non-comprehending of any of it, they weren't supposed to understand. You had your toys and your games and your books and your TV shows. These days, parent groups are encouraging fathers and mothers to watch TV **with** their kids on Saturday mornings to make it a sharing experience betwixt parents and offspring. I can think of nothing I would have liked less when I was nine. Dad was a swell guy and all that but he had his world and I was forced to live in it most of the day. Saturday morning cartoons were part of **my** world and I certainly didn't want Adults horning in on it.

Comic books were an important part of Your world and, as you grew older, one of two things happened. Either you got bored with them and found something else—or you didn't. If you got bored with them, you wouldn't be here. But—if you kept on reading them, you got deeper into them. And if you got deep into them, you wanted to find others of like interest to populate Your world.

I don't recall how I first learned of Fandom—probably via a letter column in one of Julius Schwartz's comics. But I'm quite sure that, when I learned of it, my first reaction just had to have been, "What a terrific idea." It was like a Discipline Fetisher suddenly happening upon the Irving Klaw catalogue of bondage photos. Suddenly, I wasn't nearly so lonely. There were others out there with my perversion.

My adolescence wasn't a time of great joy for me. Oh, it was better than they have it in Biafra, I suppose, but I just couldn't wait to grow up and stop living in Their World on Their terms. What made all those years tolerable, in large part, was Fandom. Fandom—at that time—meant Friends.

These days, I fear, Fandom means Finance.

Just today, I was in Earl Bowman's Passport Book Shop out in Van Nuys, picking up a four inch stack of current comics. Earl saves one of everything for me and, when I'm in the area, I fall by and pick them up. Most fans buy their comics that way, now. Like picking up the phone and ordering all the stamps of Brazil in a swoop that is, if not fell, then at least not as much fun as trucking up to Parnin's was.

Earl's one of the better dealers: Reasonable prices, personalized service and, above all, an interest in what he's selling. He knows who the writers and artists are in the comics because he likes them, not just so he'll know which artists' books he can charge more for. He is the direct antithesis of one dealer I can think of who takes particular delight—more for sadism than profit—in charging as much as possible for certain books that he knows certain of his customers desperately wanted.

So there I am, flipping through the stack of comics Earl has saved for me and a kid comes in—about age twenty, maybe, and with enough acne to be mistaken for that obscure Dick Tracy villain, Raspberry-Head. He buys the lastest issue of **Justice League** and, as he forks over his money, he says to Earl, apropos of nothing, "Say, why did

they take Wonder Woman out of the J.L.A., a few years ago?"

This is an absolute non-sequiteur. The kid has just brought the subject up, out of thin air. Obviously, it's his way of trying to strike up a conversation. Earl kind of shrugs, says he doesn't know and returns politely to this business.

I suddenly remember the one and only time I ever found myself in a rather sleazy bar. I don't drink and the story of what I was doing there, I won't bore you with. What I will bore you with is an observation. I found the place terribly depressing. It was filled with people who seemed to have no other place to go; no one else to talk to, save a tired bartender who had well learned the skill of seeming like he cared about what his patrons were saying. I got the feeling that those folks sitting at the bar spent many hours there because chatting with an indifferent bartender was preferable to whatever else they had in their lives. In brief, I found the whole setting terribly depressing.

I don't know why I thought of that when I was standing there in Earl's store. Or maybe I do.

Lonely is a pretty awful thing and I know folks who fear it more than Death. It rarely bothers me since I was an Only Child and, moreover, I skipped several grades in elementary school—the result of a highly-advanced reading/writing ability that stemmed, in no small way, from all them funnybooks. When you're the youngest kid in class [sometimes by a full year], you find yourself alone a lot and you adjust. I grew to like being a loner but **not all the time.** Never **all the time.** Life is with people, after all.

So, while I generally never mind being alone [or feeling lonely; one can be lonely with others present], there are those times . . . we all have them . . . when one finds oneself riffling one's personal phone book in search of someone [anyone!] to call. You know the feeling; if you don't want to admit it, that's your business.

And when I was in that sleazy bar that one time, I saw a lot of folks who sure looked Lonely to me. This wasn't even a Singles Bar; it was just a place that people with nowhere else to go congregated, downed H2O passed off as liquor and, in general, were lonely together. If it sounds like the place depressed me tremendously, it did.

I wasn't lonely much when I was a teen-ager and I have Fandom to thank for that. I made friends—through the mails, through fanzines, through our local comic book club. I also made enemies and I don't even mind them. Enemies are just friends who hate your guts.

Fandom was important to me, I guess that's what I'm saying. And it makes my corpuscles percolate to see what it's become. I see very few examples of it without a dollar sign affixed.

Like the guy who bought that **X-MEN #1**: He wasn't one of **my** people—the ones who would appreciate the content, as opposed to the resale value. He'll probably turn a tidy profit on the book in a few years, selling it, no doubt, to a fellow speculator. Said fellow speculator will keep it a year or three and **he'll** make a profit when he resells it to someone else and so on. Everyone will make a profit except the guy at the very end of the chain who decides to keep it. He's the one who really gets the shaft in all this and you'll recognize him, instantly. He'll be the one who reads it.

Or like the folks who throw conventions, these days. Not all of them, certainly. The San Diego Comic Convention is an exception. They give as much effort to their program and entertainment as they do to their Huckster Room. More, in fact. It's one of the few cons I ever attend where I don't feel like a shill for the dealers. That's what the pros have become, in most cases. At Boat Shows, they hire a TV star or a Playboy fold-out lady or a sports star to sign autographs, thereby luring crowds so the concessionaires can glom onto them and sell twin-screw cabin cruisers. At comics conventions, they ballyhoo Jack Kirby or John Byrne or whomever and the effect is much the same. In fact, it's exactly the same. Some dealers are fine folks and I begrudge them not a penny of their profits. But there's one type on which I place all possible poxes at my disposal. I'll tell you about him [make that "**it**"; lower species deserve asexual pronouns] later.

And even the fanzines have gone High Finance on us. I don't even begrudge their publishers a solitary copper; I just wish it all wasn't so **damned serious.**

Those of us who still care about comics seem to be at each other's jugulars, lately. I am appalled by how **maniacal** [that is the word] some fans have gotten lately in defending what are sometimes very limited version of what comics should be. The intensity of these arguments suggests something about how desperate comic book lovers are becoming to find some good comic books to love.

But that still is no excuse for such rancor and such blatant intolerance of other fans' passions.

What has happened is that the fans and pros are **too close**. It was bound to happen, what with so many fans going to work for Marvel and DC, but there's been a change. Whereas fans once discussed whether a certain issue of **SPIDER-MAN** or **FLASH** was any good, we now find ourselves immersed in discussions of what the Editor promised the Writer and why he fired him and who called whom a jackass and who has saleability with the Dealer Direct market and it's all so damned political. I have had it up to, oh, about **here** [I'm holding the hand I'm not typing with up by my forehead] with articles that play **Rashmonon** in giving what purport to be but rarely are "both sides" of every firing/resignation [choose one] in the funnybook biz. A great many fans seem far more captivated by the inner machinations of office

politicking than with the Art Form.

You know, in other fields, there's a kind of Gentlemen's Agreement that, when you get fired, you and the Company will be very tactful about the separation and will inflict no needless dagger-twists on one another. You won't run out and tell everyone that your ex-Boss is a gay, perverted, sado-masochistic child molester who traffics in illegal aliens, counterfeits T-bills and leaky condoms. And he won't run around, telling everyone that you were a drunken incompetent who got caught robbing the company payroll, diddling the Comptroller's mother-in-law in the john, and smoking your Christmas bonus. I mean, I'm exaggerating here but that **is** how it's done: amicably. They fire you without trying to make everyone (particularly your potential employers) think you're an anal sphincter. And, in return, you don't needlessly bad-mouth the Company. That's how gentlemen do it.

But now, what you have in the comic book business are all these ex-fans, some of whom are appallingly insecure about their professional stature. They care like Hell about what's said about them in the fanzines. They drag their office politics through the zines in order to make trouble—like planting spurious news items in the zines about how So-and-so's books aren't selling. And, when they have arguments in the company, they don't leave them in the company; they rush "their versions" into print, not unlike a little kid who rushes to the front door when Daddy comes home to make sure that Daddy hears **his** version of how the vase broke before Daddy hears it from Mommy. I don't usually feel sorry for the folks in power at DC and Marvel but I sympathize with them when they fire someone (rightly or wrongly) and that someone rushes to the various fanzines to get "his version" on the record, first. It puts the Powers That Be at the company in a terrible dilemma: Do they allow that version to stand, unrebutted, and taken as truth by everyone...or do they give their version and get into the position of attacking a former (and possibly unemployed) employee? I don't pretend to have an answer for this. I just think it's rather petty. No, make that **very petty**. Most of the comic book company office politics that are currently being foisted upon the zines aren't terribly accurate, either; but, even if they were, I think they have gotten too extreme, too vitriolic and too distracting from the content of the comics themselves. I don't know; maybe it says something about today's comics that many fans are more interested in how a certain writer got fired than they ever were in anything he wrote when he was employed.

Now, right about here I want to say something about fan tastes and I hope I can do so without anyone hauling out some of my old articles and saying, "See? See, you did it too, only worse." Because I did and I'm ashamed I did and it's taken me over fifteen years of Fandom to realize this. (And it may offend some of you to read it, as it might have offended me, had someone said the following to me, fourteen years back. But I've come to an opinion here about us—you and me, fellow funnybook follower, and I'll lay it on you as soon as I get out of these parentheses.)

We all have our insecurities. That's no revelation. But if your life in any way gets touched by the institution of Comics, then your insecurities get interwoven with Comics. Confusing? Let me give a f'rinstance: A lot of fans tell of stories of being ridiculed by their peers (or, at least, chided) for reading comics past the age of ten, eleven, twelve, whatever. They sometimes get a wee bit paranoid of having what they like considered "kiddy stuff." I know a few fans who loathe Carl Barks' **"Uncle Scrooge"** comics, for example. They either won't try them or, if they do, it is with only the most negative

attitude going in. They resent them and other "funny animal" comics because those are so undeniably targeted at children, whereas the super-hero and monster books are, at least ostensibly, for a more adult audience. And we all crave more "adult" comics, don't we? I mean, look through the zines and find me one without some mention of [a] how some comic stinks because it's childish or [b] the

dream of the day when comics will be accepted as adult, be read by adults, **etcetera**. As I was going through the Stuff [you remember the Stuff], I found but a few zines without **both** those sentiments in evidence. I mean, that paranoia was all over the place. Don't believe me? Mark your place in this article, haul out whatever zines you own, go through them and then come back. Okay, now you're convinced.

Now, maybe you're the exception to the following, but I **thought** I was and now I realize I wasn't. This insecurity cannot be something that is wholly divorced from you as a person. Can **not** be. The more comics are a part of your life, the more it touches you. And someplace along the line, it has to have something to do with your whole sense of self and your own maturity.

So what do we do? Well, we're imaginative folks from all that comic book reading. We formulate notions of what's good in comics and what's not good. And more often than not, I've come to realize, we ourselves set standards that are very narrow. Sometimes, we pass them off as being high, exclusive standards of discerning taste. But they aren't; at least, mine weren't, I see via hindsight. Narrow tastes are never high-class tastes; they are, at best, elitist tastes. The true gourmet appreciates a whole range of foods. He doesn't just seize upon **pate de fois gras** as some sort of ultimate and then denounce everything that isn't **pate de fois gras** as pig slop. But the fans do this. I was going to cite some examples here but I'm trying to not get personally insulting and, anyway, you can find them just as well as I can. All too often, the fan-critic has his little group of favorites: certain art styles, certains approaches to laying out a page, a certain level of intensity to the writing...and he digs his heels in. He digs his heels in and he says, "This is good, this is what all comics should be." Personally, I think that comics won't really be mature until they encompass a wider ranger of styles—both of art and writing—and a wider subject matter. But the kind of folks who are now writing comic critiques have horizons that are about as wide as Shelley Duvall in a waist-clincher.

And many are not above ignoring certain facts [or inventing their own] to substantiate their beliefs. They quote spurious sales figures, either cobbled up from thin air or picked up from the rumor mill. The Little Archivist that lives within me [the one who makes me amass all these books] is more than a shade offended by the level of misinformation that is being bandied about. So much of comic book history is going unrecorded and unpreserved while what little **is** being written is riddled with half-truths, quarter-truths and others so fractional as to be virtually microscopic. I am not unfamiliar with the matter of comic history inaccuracy serving, as I did, as a Contributing Editor for a thing called **THE WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF COMICS** a few years back. That was a fancy volume of data, assembled by a Main Editor who was not about to let bothersome chores like proof-reading stand in the way of a publication date. It was kind of a frustrating experience for two reasons. One was that the book contained a lot of never-before-published, completely accurate material on comics [including, I'd like to think, what little I contributed] but that material was rendered suspect by its proximity to a number of inexcusable, obvious-to-anyone errors. Secondly, many fanzines rushed to denounce the book as being inaccurate and, in doing so, usually managed to make as many errors in their corrections. It was like being called Fat by Orson Welles.

The trouble with fandom misinformation is that it gets passed about so much, especially if it goes unrebutted. Lately, a great many vituperative [and supposedly true] accounts have been circulated throughout fandom—in print or otherwise—about how certain writers or artists were fired or how their books bombed or how they slept with a certain someone they shouldn't have. Many of these stories are blatantly untrue—or, at least, exaggerated—as can often be seen if one puts some simple, unemotional logic to them. From my knowledge of the people involved, I **know** many of the stories to be untrue and, obviously, the source of many is those aforesaid industry people who are not above using the fandom grapevine to promote rumors they'd **like** to have spread for their own purposes. Jack Kirby, I know, has been a particular victim of this and he's especially vulnerable since he's been so powerful in the field, since so many are so jealous of this, and since Jack opts not to rebut [or, lately, even read] the often-outright lies that some zines have run about him under the guise of reportage or discussion. I keep coming across all these bizarre, usually contradictrory tales of Jack and his recent career and how his books sold and why they were terminated. Since Kirby is not rebutting them, his detractors feel free to spread them as "fact" when they are, in actuality, unrebutted lies. People love to seize upon "facts" that seem to document their opinions.

We all have our points of view and we're all entitled to them...that is, as long as we don't resort to lies and specious arguments to disseminate them. Fans are so often attacked by non-fans for reading comics...you'd think they'd be a little less willing to attack other fans for what **they** like.

Next issue, Mark Evanier talks about the current events within the industry and the way they have shaped the fandom industry.

CAPTAIN HEROIC and his side-kick SIDE-KICK

Faster than a speeding bound! More powerful than a speeding bullet! Able to leap tall buildings in a locomotive! Heads up, comics fans—'coz you ain't seen nothing like ***CAPTAIN HEROIC!***

Editor's note: And probably never will again, once the publisher sees it!

Editor's note: Hi, Hal!

Faster, ***Side-Kick***, faster! We're heading out on the most important mission of our career!

Boyoboy, Cap! Does that mean we get to ***hurt*** people?

Very probably, ***Side-Kick***, very probably. For we must stop the man who knows...

... THE ORIGIN OF CAPTAIN HEROIC

K. BUSIEK / T. LINEHAN

Suddenly...

Chee! Goons!

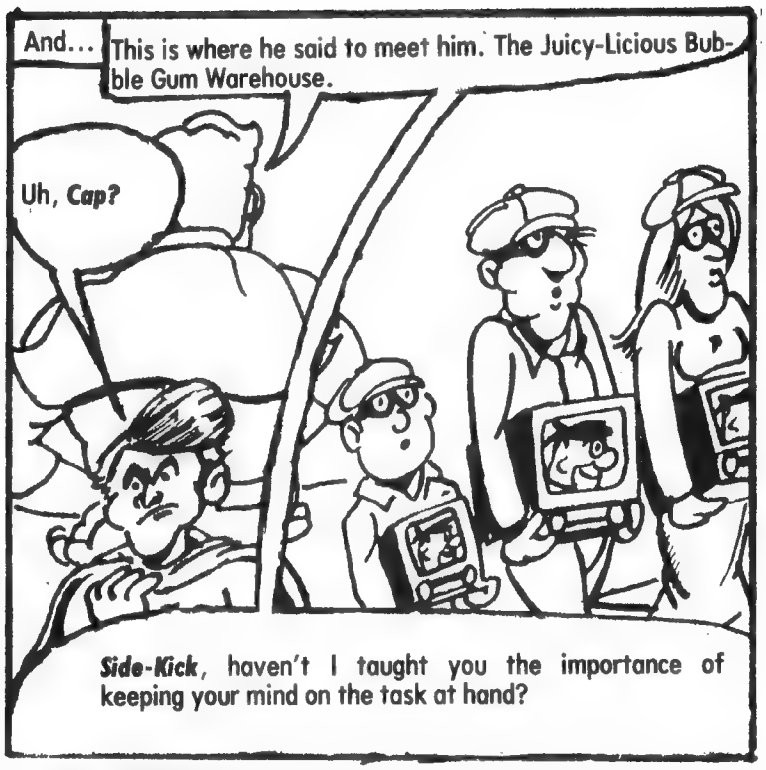
Wha? No! We—we're agents of F.L.A.G.! Y'know, *F*ighters for *L*iberty *A*nd *G*oodness? Y'know?

Sure you are. Make it snappy, ***Side-Kick***! We've got important business to take care of!

You—y'wanna see my badge?

C'mere, goons! I'm gonna break your heads! Oh boy, am I ever!

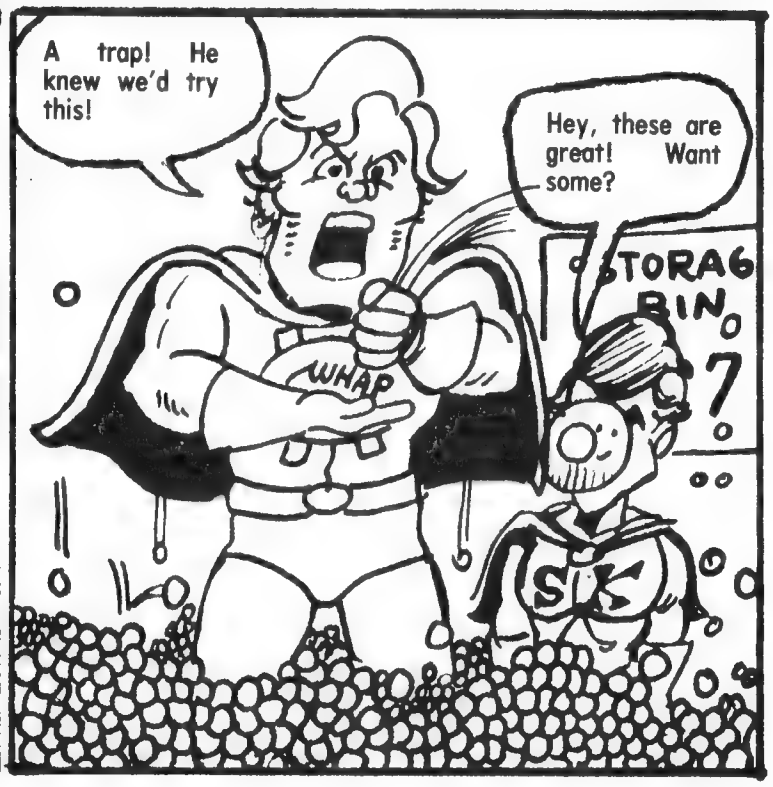
See? My badge? See? Oh, I hurt...
I FALL To PIECES


And...
This is where he said to meet him. The Juicy-Licious Bubble Gum Warehouse.
Uh, Cap?
Side-Kick, haven't I taught you the importance of keeping your mind on the task at hand?

But...
But nothing! Now, he'll be expecting us to come through the front door—so you'd better exert a little of that star-spawned strength of yours to get us through that wall!

Bill No Pants
Oh, goody! That's what I like about being stronger 'n you, Cap! I get to DESTROY things!

POW!
ORIGINAL STUFF, HUH?


A trap! He knew we'd try this!
Hey, these are great! Want some?
STORAGE BIN
WHAP
SIS

We're in! But keep a sharp lookout for more of those gumball traps!

Gee, I don't know if I can take another of those—my pockets are jammed already!

ICK SHICK SHICK SHICK

* Please repeat the previous Sound Effects. Thank

Greetings, ***Captain Heroic!*** How nice of you to respond to my message so punctually!

It's... ***him!***

Funny, he doesn't ***look*** like a criminal mastermind...

What does a criminal mastermind normally look like?

Like ***this!***

My costume's at the laundry right now, so I had to make do with what was in the closet.

Now wait a minute...

How do I know you really ***are*** a criminal mastermind, and that this isn't just an elaborate hoax! Anyone can carry around a picture!

Quite simple, my dear ***Captain***, I'll prove it! I'll narrate a flashback of your origin, and then threaten you with a public revelation of your secrets unless you do my every whim. ***That*** sound villainous enough for you?

It'll do for a start...

Ha! He's playing right into my hands! He doesn't realize that I have a contingency plan for identity exposers! But he'll learn it... soon!

...Hello... Give me Audio Visual Willya.

Hey! What's Going on?

* How Should I know I'm only Drawing This!

What is ***Captain Heroic***'s contingency plan? Will it work against this heinous villain? Well, we'll just have to wait and see, 'coz right now, it's ***origin time!***

It all started, as many things do, on television! Everybody remembers the fantastically popular ***CAPTAIN HEROIC*** series, watched avidly by millions of kids and adults alike...

POW

Your bullets won't stop me now!

COMPLIMENTS OF AUDIO VISUAL

...but few people ever learned the strange story behind the show's cancellation!

Dramatically falling Neilsen ratings drove the show off the tube, and no one could understand why, least of all the star, Bruce Clark, until...

You wouldn't do our commercials, Clark, so we got our revenge! We fixed the Neilsens—and now you'll never work again!

GASP.

RATING

THEM 1 US 0

Heartbroken, Bruce returned to his penthouse, bought when his modest actor's salary was parlayed into billions by his clever accountant, ***Professor Death...***

...strange name, that...

There's no way to prove a thing! Blast! If only I really ***was Captain Heroic!*** Then all I'd have to do is say ***SHA-BOOM*** and...

Variety

HELLO LARRY SMASH HIT

HAWK BOMB

BUSIER SUE

$$$$$

SHA-BOOM!

SOUND EFFECTS BY SHA-NA-NA

Hey! It worked! Somehow, for some reason, I've been given powers beyond those of mortal men—I've become ***Captain Heroic!***

LOOK! It's DA Hulk!

NICK FURY

Instantly, the new super-hero sprang into action...

Gee, ***Cap,*** you never told ***me*** any of this before!

I know. I thought it sounded kinda stupid.

CLIK

Please! I'm trying to tell a story here!

Anyway, ***Captain Heroic*** broke up the Neilsen Gang, and vindicated himself on nationwide teevee...

This is great! Now we can bring back ***CAPTAIN HEROIC*** with the ***real*** Captain—not the wimp, Bruce Clark!

But, alas, it was not meant to be...

...for, in a coast-to-coast, three-network press conference, ***Captain Heroic*** announced...

I will be devoting my life to the eternal combat against evil and the forces that would destroy happiness both on the tube and off! And I swear to you, the American public, that...

Eh? Oh, okay...

...a word from Colgleem, the toothpaste that gets your...

And now, since we're running late...

T. LINEHAN

And thus, a legend was born!

I must admit, that's the truth! You've penetrated my secret!

Haha! Then I have you in my power! With you as my helpless slave I can do anything! I can rob Fort Knox! I can detsroy the government! I can put ***GREEN ACRES*** reruns in prime time! I—

Eat hot lead, you Commie rat!

MATTEL

DUNG VIOLENCE!

Aww, I wanted to do that!

Sorry, but there are things a man has to do for himself!

GREEN ACRES? In prime time? Yeech!

Hooterville

Next: The senses-stunning story you thought would never see print! The awesome, unforgettable, etc., ***Captain Heroic III!*** (We don't know what'll be in it either, but there's no place to go but up, right?

SEND 25¢ and Your Favorite Sound EFFECT To Bob Soron in Care of This Magazine!

YOU WILL SUBSCRIBE TO RBCC

RBCC has been a regular staple of comics fandom since 1961 and in December of 1981 will have achieved 20 years of non-stop publication, a feat unprecedented in comics fandom. 1981 will also usher in another new era for the magazine in other ways, as it will now be typeset and will feature color covers.

1981 will see the start of an authorized comic strip adaptation of Edgar Rice Burrough's last Martian novel, **John Carter and the Skeleton Men of Jupiter**, drawn by Bret Blevins. **RBCC** is the only place that you will find this important comics serial.

RBCC will also cover films and SF. There will be features of the new **Flash Gordon**, as well as coverage of important sf novels and collections, including examinations of Frank Herbert's **Dune** saga and the work of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

The comics scene will also be covered in features on Steve Ditko's Spider-Man which will examine what made this series unique and why it epitomizes what Marvel comics were all about in the early Sixties. Plus, an editor at one of the comics companies recently told a writer that "Comics are not meant to show feelings." **RBCC** will take that statement to task and show exactly why it's completely wrong.

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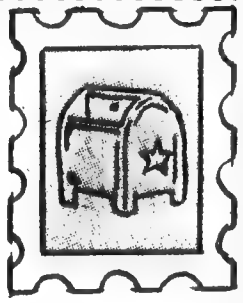

GOD AND MAN IN COMICS

PART THREE

©1981 DC Comics

by Lou Mougin

In 1974, God made his first-ever on-stage appearance in Marvel Comics. And, just to be sure we got our money's worth, he created the universe.

The comic was Dr. Strange's **MARVEL PREMIERE #14**, and we use a little "h" in "he" because **this** god was Sise-Neg, not Yahweh. Now, Yahweh must have existed in the Marvel Universe, because the Mystic Master himself called upon Him...or Jehovah, if you will...to get rid of a nasty case of vampirism. Of course, when Strange tried calling upon God a few days later when he was battling the Devil, it didn't work. Pretty convoluted, eh?

Those are just a few of the religion-oriented plot twists Steve Englehart introduced into his famed run of **DR. STRANGE**, from 1973 to 1976. Stainless Steve took a crack at Catholicism, Buddhism, Pantheism, evolution and every other system of belief lying around to be exploited in a storyline, had the universe retreaded twice, and introduced us face-to-face to several of its Prime Movers. Before he was done, comicdom had several of the most well-known God-and-Man encounters down in print, and they ranged from the nearly-offensive to the sublime.

Really, Dr. Strange was the only traditional Marvel hero who could be in touch with the Infinite, as a Sorceror Supreme. And, though his 1960s adventures had always touched on the cosmic (particularly with the introduction of Eternity in **STRANGE TALES #138**, the appearance of the Living Tribunal in **#**158, and the confronatation of Eternity with Dormammu—almost a parody of the Satanic rebellion—in **#**146), no scripter had ever before taken Strange into the realm of the quasireligious. Steve Englehart, probably the best superhero scripter of the 1970s, took that step. Afterwards, no one, not even Jim Starlin, would ever take him that far again.

Englehart inherited Dr. Strange at the end of a rather tedious Gardner Fox plotline in **MARVEL PREMIERE** and, with the aid of artist and co-plotter Frank Brunner, began forging one of Strange's greatest eras. The story, at the time, pitted Strange, Clea, Wong, and the Ancient One against Shuma-Gorath (the ancient embodiment of evil, a Cthuloid monster out to control the universe, or at least earth). Some spiritual elements may have entered as early as the eighth page of Englehart's first story, as Dr. Strange was treated to an image of himself being crucified. But that fails to dissuade Earth's Sorceror Supreme, and he makes his way back to his homeworld to confront Shuma-Gorath's minions in the Crypts of Kaa-U.

It just so happens that one of Shuma-Gorath's chief agents is the repulsive Living Buddha. Sadistic, inhumanly obese and in league with mankind's greatest enemy, the Living Buddha was anything but a fair representative of one of mankind's great living religions. One might assume Englehart meant this character to be a sort of Buddhist Antichrist, but such is never made clear in the story. As it stood, the Living Buddha was quite an offensive caricature. But that was all right, as Stainless Steve would give Christianity a few whacks later on just to be fair. In the very next issue, Shuma himself conjured up for Strange an image of a Christian church being burned and a Jewish synagogue with cracks defacing the Star of David, while a big-bellied Satanic statue, almost a Buddha with horns, drew worshippers. Luckily, our hero won in the end, and the Living Buddha was crushed in a cave-in. Good riddance.

Soon afterwards, in **MARVEL PREMIERE #13-14**, Englehart got himself into the biggest mystical hot water of his career with the introduction of the Sise-Neg. [Spell it backwards...] A sor-

ceror from the far future, Sise-Neg was travelling backwards steadily in time, absorbing all mystical energy in existence. His purpose was quite simple:

"I am **now** ready to **complete** my journey, to an era when there were **no** other magicians, when I shall control **all** the mystical energy there **is**—**the dawn of Creation**! And what is **another** term for an **all-powerful being** at the **dawn of Creation**? I shall **tell** you as I **leave** you, gentlemen—**it is GOD!**"

Strange and Baron Mordo trail Sise-Neg down through the past each seeking to influence him for good or evil. They debark at Merlin's time, and then pass on to Sodom and Gomorrah. In a less-than-Biblical retelling of the Genesis story, Strange, Mordo, and Sise-Neg are attacked by priests with magic wands. [Sodom is said to be "lost in sin and degradation," but no indication is made that they are sinful homosexuals; they just like to zap people with wands.] Sise-Neg is angered, and sets them straight immediately: "You have angered—God!" as he blitzes them and the city straight into eternity. Lot and his wife make a cameo appearance fleeing the city. She is not, interestingly enough, changed into a pillar of salt.

Backwards turn Sise-Neg, Strange and Mordo again, this time to a volcanic area of prehistoric Earth. There, men are still evolving from an apelike state, but are rapidly getting squeezed to death by the tentacles of the loathsome Shuma-Gorath.

I HAVE BEEN WRONG!
MY PLAN TO RE-CREATE THE UNIVERSE IN MY IMAGE WAS TRULY PITIABLE!
I HAVE ACHIEVED MY GOD-HOOD, BUT IN DOING SO, I HAVE LEARNED THE TRUTH AT EVERY-THING IS AS IT SHOULD BE, IF ONE CAN ONLY SEE IT!
REALITY IS ALWAYS HARMONY!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

Sise-Neg decided to travel back in time to the creation of the universe, and be the only sentient creature at that event—thereby achieving godhood.

Sise-Neg takes pity, puts Shuma-Gorath to sleep and relocates him in an alternate dimension. Then, for the two surviving apelike beings, he creates a garden...

Finally, back at Creation, Sise-Neg makes the universe uncreate itself. The whole of space goes dark. He now possesses total power. Strange, however, picks out his face with an amulet beam, and Sise-Neg, now "God" for all intents and purposes [?], recites his last soliloquy:

"My plan to recreate the universe in my image was truly **pitiable**! I have achieved my **godhood**, but in doing so, I have learned the **truth** that **everything** is as it **should** be, if we can only **see** it!...**Man** is imperfect—but he is this dimension's **closest approximation** of perfection! I cannot **improve** upon that, so I **shall** recreate the universe—exactly as it was **before**!" [He does.] "When you **remember** this, think not of the **man** called **Sise-Neg**—but the **God** called—**Genesis**!"

With that, Strange and Mordo pop back into their own time, and Strange ponders whether they saw the second Creation, or "the First, reoccuring?" As it turned out, that was the least of his worries.

For better of for worse, it did appear—due to Englehart casting Sise-Neg in a Biblical role twice in the story, and a Marv Wolfman story in **DR. STRANGE ANNUAL #1** in which Strange affirms, "I saw **God**"—that Englehart did intend his future sorceror to indeed be the Creator. But, as Strange pointed out, who then created the universe that Sise-Neg un-created? Who, so to speak, provided the blueprint that Genesis built from? If Sise-Neg was responsible for two Biblical miracles, then did any **others** occur, and, if so, who was responsible for **them**? It should be noted that Englehart steered clear of the New Testament entirely in this story—indeed, save for two early stories from the Book of Genesis, he glossed over the **entire** Bible. And, of course, there were other religions he could have turned to for handy miracle-workings, but, as an ex-Catholic, Stainless Steve was primarily familiar with the Hebraic tradition. So were his readers, more importantly. And one could certainly quibble with several of Sise-Neg's "perfection" statements—unless we, too, cannot "only see it." The Sise-Neg encounter was a very good story, but, like all comicbook encounters with God, riddled with holes.

In the aftermath of this story, God's appearance was called to the attention of Stan Lee himself. Stan, reportedly worried about bad publicity, ordered Englehart to print a retraction, disavowing Sise-Neg's godhood or some such. To get arouund this, a fake letter [addressed to Stan Lee] was concocted, supposedly written by the "Reverend David Billingsley" of Denton, Texas, praising Lee and Marvel for the story. It read, in part:

"The other evening at our Church's Christmas social, a young member of my congregation showed me a comic book you present called **MARVEL PREMIERE**...I borrowed the comic from him, thinking I would find another denigration of our Lord in the manner that is fashionable these days. However, after reading this issue, I must commend you on the taste and perception you, your editor, and your writer showed in handling a very difficult subject. It is magazines such as yours which truly perform the Lord's work, and open new eyes to His majesty.

I have since recommended **MARVEL PREMIERE** to many of my congregation and friends. Thank you, Mr. Lee, for your fine work."

The letter made the letter column of **DR. STRANGE #3**, and, presumably, the heat was taken off of Englehart from then on. He proceeded to give Strange one of his strangest human opponents ever, a nutty ex-Catholic Cardinal by the name of Silver Dagger!

Dagger was an engaging white-haired type who succeeded in killing Dr. Strange (not for long, and it wouldn't be the last time) and tried to deprogram Clea by torture as if she were a member of the Children of God. Silver Dagger explained his motives in **DR. STRANGE #5**: First a priest, then a cardinal, Dagger had been the Pope's personal choice to succeed him. However, the College of Cardinal's overrode the pontiff: "Publicly, they speak of your youth. Privately, they murmur of fanaticism."

Irritated (to put it mildly), Silver Dagger wends his way into the Vatican Library, wherein dwell most of the volumes of black magic in the world. After seven days of study, he finds himself with mystical powers. Dagger vows to master magic in order to purge it from the world, and to do that he must murder the greatest sorcerors on Earth. "It was Dr. Strange whose death God decreed!" But Strange turns up reborn and shows Dagger the error of his ways. Chastised, the ex-cleric takes up residence within the Eye of Agomotto. He appeared in a later issue of **MARVEL TEAM-UP**, but the religious angle was not employed.

Actually, Dagger came off not as a diatribe against Catholicism, but as a warning against fanaticism. As such, he was hardly offensive. However, there was one telling line in which Englehart made a comparison perhaps deeper than he had intended: "They called **Christ** insane, too—and **Cotton Mather**—and the members of the **Inquisition**!"

After this series, Englehart left theology alone until issue #13. There, Eternity, the manlike embodiment of the Universe, accidentally destroys Earth in his sleep. Eternity reveals that "I and my brother, Death, comprise all of your reality, mystic! Neither he nor I am **God**, for God rules **all** realities!" The Archetypal Man admits that it was

I AM ADAM QADMON, THE ARCHETYPAL MAN, AND IN MY AEON DREW MORTALS, EACH IN THEIR VARIOUS WORLDS!
FROM MY SUBSTANCE THEY DREW LIFE, AND THROUGH MY WILL THEY ATHEM PERFECT AT FIRST. THERE WAS ONLY ALGAE IN THEIR GREAT MOTHER SEAS... SIMPLE SOULS.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

One of the resident gods of the Marvel Universe—though not by any means is he God.

he who directed the evolution of life in the universe, and advanced said life to humanoid status. Then, after a little convincing by Strange and the Ancient One, Eternity lets bygones be bygones and recreates the Earth. After **MARVEL PREMIERE #14**, it must have seemed old hat.

(Interestingly, in **AVENGERS #173** and **177**, Jim Shooter further codified the Marvel cosmos by presenting Odin, Zeus and Mephisto—ostensibly a Satan-figure—as equals, and Eternity as more powerful than all of them. Further elaboration will doubtless be forthcoming.)

With all the theosophical implications cropping up in **DR. STRANGE** during this period, it seemed only fitting that his next foe should come from Marvel's other religiously-oriented series. So, in a two-part crossover, Dr. Strange ended up battling Dracula, and finally called on Yahweh, the Judeo-Christian God. And was heard!

Dracula, prowling for victims, comes upon Stephen Strange's manservant Wong and drains him dry. Strange vows vengeance, but seeks Dracula's aid in resurrecting Wong, and thus has to hold himself back in combat with the vampire. The villain takes advantage of this restraint and kills Strange, converting him into a vampire. (The astute reader will note that Strange had died already, once, at the hands of Silver Dagger. Only Adam Warlock would match Dr. Strange's record in comics).

Luckily, Dr. Strange had escaped by leaving his body in his ectoplasmic form, and bedevils Dracula while waiting for his body to rise after the prerequisite three days. (This, of course, was intended to blasphemously parallel Christ's resurrection.) During this same story, Dracula comes upon a deconsecrated church, soon to figure prominently in his own series. Finally, sorceror and slave of Satan come to grips once again, as Strange enters his now-vampiric body. The magician feels the evil influence within himself as he grapples with

Dracula, and suddenly recalls just "Who holds power—**here**!" Then, thinking, "I've called on—**many gods**—in my life! **Never**—have I needed strength—more than **now**!"

Aloud, Dr. Strange pronounces a spell: "In the name of the **Tetragrammaton, Jehovah**! O great **Unmanifest**, hear my **plea**!"

It works.

The fanged Dr. Strange feels Godly power course through his body, burning himself and Dracula both. The image of a cross obliterates Dracula from sight. When it clears, Dracula appears to be a charred corpse. Then, Strange purges himself and Wong (whom he manages to return to life) free of evil influence with a spell that so drains him that "I could **never** perform such feats again...Thank **God**, Dracula will menace man **no more**!"

Famous last words, as it turned out.

Actually, the invocation of Yaweh (Jehovah, in the more popular form) by Dr. Strange comes off as a bit of deus ex machina only a bit above Christ's rescue of the Ghost Rider. To begin with, Strange yokes God together with the Vishantist deities he customarily calls upon (and, we presume, worships) by saying "I've called on **many gods**." However, Strange is technically a pagan. Yahweh, according to Judeo-Christian theology, is not only a jealous God, but the only God that exists. In this light, Dr. Strange's evocation of holy power comes off as somewhat ludicrous.

Moreover, Dracula survives the combat. This seems more than a little quizzical; in every issue of his own comic, Dracula is repulsed by crosses, holy water, Stars of David and other religious artifacts. How he manages to make it unharmed (his corpse-like appearance was a hypnotic trick) through an invocation of the direct power of God is an unexplained mystery. The ending of **DR. STRANGE #14**, theologically, just doesn't make sense.

However, Englehart soon redeemed himself with an excellent follow-up. If the choice had to be made, it's probably that **DR. STRANGE #16** would be the best religiously-oriented comic book of the 1970s. Few comics, save **SILVER SURFER #3**, equal it in well-considered premise and excellent execution.

It all began when Doctor Strange went to Hell.

Undergoing one of his periodic losses of confidence, the Sorceror Supreme and his lady Clea are abducted to Satan's realm. The Devil, far from being the Shakespearean Mephisto or the super-villain of **GHOST RIDER** or even the philosophic satirist of Gerber, is a terrifying mocker and illusionist. In Mick Jagger's voice, he pronounces a litany of names that recall **SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL**: "Call me Mephistopheles, or Beelzebub, or Old Nick! My name is Legion! Call me what you will, but remember, for every minute of your eternal damnation—you **gave** yourself to me! Yes, and Clea and James Mandarin as well!"

Raging at Satan, who does a fade-out, Dr. Strange almost reverts to vampirism; he even sprouts fangs. As he calms, Strange realizes that he must not only defeat Satan, but "the dark side of my own soul, as well!"—more of a task than the Silver Surfer, who was never damned as Strange is, ever had to face. On Earth, the allies of Strange prepare for an exorcism, but "it may **well fail**!"

And failure is all Dr. Strange appears to meet with. He tries to rescue what appears to be the Earth Goddess from a pile of filth reaching to her neck. Instead, Strange ends up in the same pit and the goddess changes into the Devil. He taunts the magician with the sight of Clea in chains atop a tower, to which Strange responds, "Damn you, Satan! Damn you!"

"Not a chance, bubby!" taunts the Devil. "I may be fallen, but I fell from Heaven! You're the only one who can be damned here—and you **are**!"

Strange frees himself of the clinging muck and, putting his faith in what worked against Dracula, invokes the power of Yahweh against His greatest

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ALL AT ONCE, EVERYTHING BECOMES CLEAR!
I DON'T HAVE TO FIGHT YOU! THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT!
THAT IS WHAT'S KEEPING ME HERE!
I'M LEAVING HERE, LUCIFER! WITH CLEA, AND MANDARIN! NOW!
LIKE HELL, SORCERER! YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME!
YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHICH WAY IS UP!

Doctor Strange confronts Satan in Hell—and wins.

enemy—"Tetragrammaton, grant me Thy might!" Nothing happens. Strange's faith is weakened anew. More illusions. More failure. Strange is being herded towards madness like a sheep towards a gate. In passing, we note that Englehart makes Satan equivalent to Strange's old foe Dormammu: "Curse you, Satan!" cries Clea. "In my dimension, at least, the lord of evil faces his foes directly!"

"And that's why I'll succeed with Strange, where Dormammu failed!"

Soon, Satan assumes the guise of a giant serpent

and encoils himself about Strange. "He's mocking me, but everything he says is true!" thinks the doctor. "All the forces I face are eternal! What has man ever done to change them?" The Devil allows him to defeat the serpent, then plops Clea back in his lap. However, Clea's features dissolve and are replaced by those of Satan himself. "You fell for it **again**!" chortles the Devil. "You haven't learned a **thing!**" And, as a caption notes, "In that instant, Dr. Strange topples toward **madness**!"

Yet, all is not lost [as such cliches must go]. Strange senses the concern of his friends on Earth as they attempt an exorcism. At that, Strange knows the answer to his dilemma. "I don't have to fight you!" he declares to Lucifer. "That's what you want! **That** is what's keeping me here!" And, despite the Devil's sneers, Strange kneels, almost in a position of prayer, while Hell explodes about him in redoubled fury. Angrily, Satan reaches down himself for the unperturbed figure: "You force me to fight you myself, Doctor! You could have spared yourself that!"

He touches Strange, and falls back, screaming. "And **bursts**!"

DR. Strange and Clea rematerialize on Earth. In one of his best dialogues ever, Englehart sums up his own philosophy of the Adversary:

"**Remember** this, Clea! If you never learn **another thing** from me, remember **this**—the **Evil One** exists only if you **allow** him to!"

"You mean—none of that was **real**?"

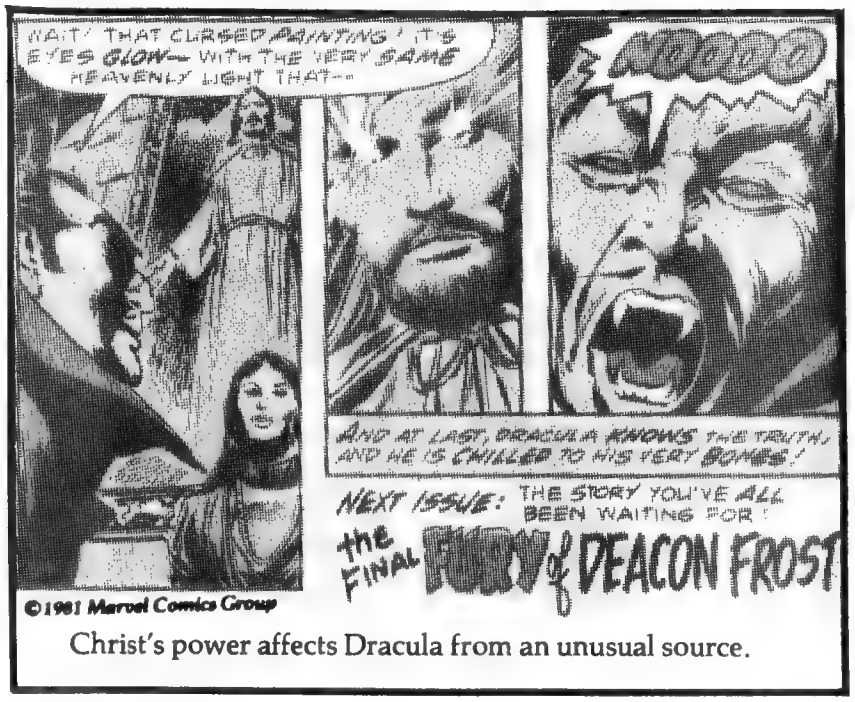
"It's **real**, all right! It couldn't be **more** real—if you believe Lucifer's **lies**!...The fault, in fact, lay with **me**! I was the one who insisted on seeing everything **darkly**, even while the **world** rolled on as bright as **ever**! **One** failure led to **another**, until I **did**, **indeed**, deliver us to Hell! The thing was, I could deliver us **from** Hell the same way! My power was never weakened...only my ability to **use** it!...

"None of us is a God—not even a magician! We must all face limitations, and failures! But, if we look beyond the barriers, and **help** each other when the darkness falls—none of us need **ever** enter **Hell again**!"

And, thankfully, Dr. Strange never did.

But Dracula, in a very literal sense, was about to do just that.

In a fifteen-issue novel which must be summarized rather tersely for lack of space here, Dracula takes over the deconsecrated church, finds himself helpless to remove a painting of Christ, and takes over a Satanist cult presided over by the scheming priest, Anton Lupeski—a name which had to be suggested by that of Anton LeVey, head of the very real Church of Satan. Masquerading as the devil, Dracula is able to take as a bride the curiously innocent Domini, with whom he produces a child, the gold-skinned, red-eyed Janus. Dracula's plot is to amass temporal-spiritual power by making the Satanist cult a major world religion—Lupeski's counter-plot is to kill Dracula and achieve said power by gaining control of Janus. During the wedding of Dracula and Domini, where Lupeski proclaims Dracula "**the only true God!**", the Christ painting, unbeknownst to all, weeps real tears. Dracula truly falls in love with Domini, while a caption hints that, despite the blasphemy, the figure whose likeness is in the painting knows that their plans will only follow the courses He sets for them. Domini, somehow, senses the same. When Dracula attacks her vengeful father, she realizes that he died—presumably through Divine intervention—before he could be infected with vampirism.


WAIT! THAT CURSED PAINTING! ITS EYES GLOW WITH THE VERY SAME FERVENT LIGHT THAT—
AND AT LAST, DRACULA KNOWS THE TRUTH, AND HE IS CHALLED TO HIS VERY KNEES!
NEXT ISSUE: THE STORY YOU'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR!
the FINAL FURY of DEACON FROST
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Christ's power affects Dracula from an unusual source.

Lupeski maneuvers the Silver Surfer into attacking Dracula—he enters the dark church, fittingly, through the painting—but the Sentinel of the Spaceways breaks off the battle when Domini calls a solution: "Now I can fly more easily. For, I know there is hope now for man. **I know there is hope**!" [It was easily the best Surfer story since he lost his own magazine.]

Then, finally, the good guys make an appearance. In issue **#52**, Dracula recalls how a force he could not resist induced him to abandon several of his schemes in centuries past—for instance, it forbade him taking control of a German province in the 19th Century, or from executing a Spanish peasant. Now, Dracula encounters that force, in the person of a gold-skinned, white-and-blue uniformed figure who has "bent sent by **my** master to **watch** you—to **stop** you in your most ignoble attempts at conquest...For it has been decreed only He shall stand over the world. **None but He!**"

The being's powers overwhelm Dracula's, and the vampire believe him to be an agent of Satan. However, through trickery, Dracula is able to strike from behind and impale him with a steel bar. Almost nonchalantly, the white-haired combatant asks, "What?! It is time for me to die already?" When

WE SURVIVE BECAUSE HE KNOWS, WITHOUT SATAN — WITHOUT ULTIMATE EVIL, THERE CAN BE NO ULTIMATE GOOD
WE SURVIVE BECAUSE THERE MUST BE A CHOICE FOR HIS CHILDREN TO MAKE... WE SURVIVE TO OFFER THAT CHOICE, TO TEMPT HIS CHILDREN INTO MAKING THE WRONG CHOICE...
...WE SURVIVE BECAUSE HE BELIEVES HIS CHILDREN WILL REFUTE US AND FOLLOW HIS PATH...

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The balance between Good and Evil in the Marvel Universe. This follows the philosophy that sain- must be tempted to be saints.

Dracula snarls at him to "Go back to Hell where you belong!", his adversary explains, "There is **another** side which fights this endless battle between good and evil...and it is **that** side which will be victorious, for I have seen the future."

The golden man expires, but a ghostlike form rises from his body. Dracula follows it to his deconsecrated church, and is unable to locate the being anywhere, until he notices the eyes of the Christ-painting glowing with a "heavenly light"—and screams!

The ending of the story was more than a little misleading, for it seemed to imply that the "agent of God" was an incarnation of Christ, though he was intended only to be an angelic being. Nevertheless, the story, for the first time in the series, implied that in a world in which vampires were allowed to exist, so, too, could Heavenly agents of more than equal power. In this story, Wolfman seemed to reaffirm the traditional view that even Satan's power is totally circumscribed, and can be exercised no further than his Maker allows.

Also, it is interesting to contrast the roles of the Christian evangelist, Josiah Dawn, and the Satanic priest Lupeski at this point. Neither of the two really seems to be in contact with their object or worship, and they are not delivered from untimely death when it comes to them. Dawn, however, comes off as sincere, though self-doubting and rather stupid, and working primarily [at least, in his own view] for the benefit of his God. Lupeski is a conniver and a plotter. Whether he actually believes in Satan or not is never revealed; his primary motivation is power, and he is not squeamish about murdering to get it. [Dawn's power play, interestingly, hinges on raising Dracula from the dead; Lupeski's depends on killing him again.] Both are, in the end, rather ineffectual figures and it is implied that Heaven and Hell continue their chessgame oblivious to the mortals who would presume to "use" them for their personal ends.

Eventually, Dracula's son Janus is born, on December 25th [the traditional, but not the actual, date of Christ's birth], and, months later, during a Satanic ritual, Dracula finds himself in a deathtrap engineered by Lupeski. He escaped doom, but Janus is killed by accident. In a frightening climax, Dracula crushes Lupeski's face with his bare hands off-panel. The Harker clan, nearby, are spellbound with fear. Yet, Domini is able to turn away, having known beforehand somewhat of what was to occur. And she turns to the Christ painting.

"When I first saw You many months ago, I saw the shining in your eyes. I knew then what was to happen. But I didn't...couldn't know how horrible it would be. God, I **didn't** know...How much blood will there be on my son's grave? How many deaths will it take before one innocent child's path to the heavens is assured? Why must **vengeance be Yours**?"

There is no answer. Domini reaches out to Dracula, who is apoplectic that she heeds "**His** words over **mine**!" "Please, come here. Embrace me, and accept His words. He will show you the way."

"You can't understand what I've become, and why I can't do what you ask me to do!" cries Dracula as he flees in bat-form. "Lord help me...I can't!"

The last phase of **TOMB OF DRACULA**'s existence delved more into the superstructure of Good and Evil than anything that had gone before. Briefly: Domini, by a heaven-borne spell, is allowed to resurrect Janus from the grave, and the infant's form joins with that of the angel Dracula had "slain" before to form a composite being. Thus, Dracula's greatest enemy is now his son. Both have a series of inconclusive encounters until they are summoned into the presence of Satan himself. This Adversary is dissimilar to any Marvel conception beforehand, though leaning a bit in the direction of the original Mephisto: physically huge, horned, breathing flame, and referring to himself in the plural and as "the one and true Satan!", he summons Dracula to stand trial. Satan describes himself in issue **#**64:

"Your power is less than nothing—for our power is greater than yours—and even **our** power is nothing! We survive because **He** knows, without Satan—without ultimate evil, there can be no ultimate good. We survive because there must be a choice for His children to make...we survive to offer that choice, to tempt His children into making the wrong choice...We survive because He believes His children will refute us and follow His path...We once had the same decision to make that He offers His

children, but we chose to rule in Hell rather than serve in Heaven... and therefore, we were granted this existence, providing we do not upset the ultimate balance..."

After Satan predicts that "You will pray to a God you had never before acknowledged to save you...and He will not!", he strips Dracula of his vampiric powers. There is more: and **TOMB OF DRACULA #64** bears reading by anyone interested in a good depiction of Satan a la **Paradise Lost.** But, in the meantime, a now-human Dracula is hunted by vampires and mortals alike, and, finally, confronted by his foes, he mutters, "I **was** a great man...a greater **vampire**, too!...**God**! I don't want to die this way!...Satan? That stinking, fetid mockery! **Bah**! With every fiber of my **being**, I renounce him!"

At that, "Quincy Harker," who confronts him, sheds his disguise and stands revealed as Satan...

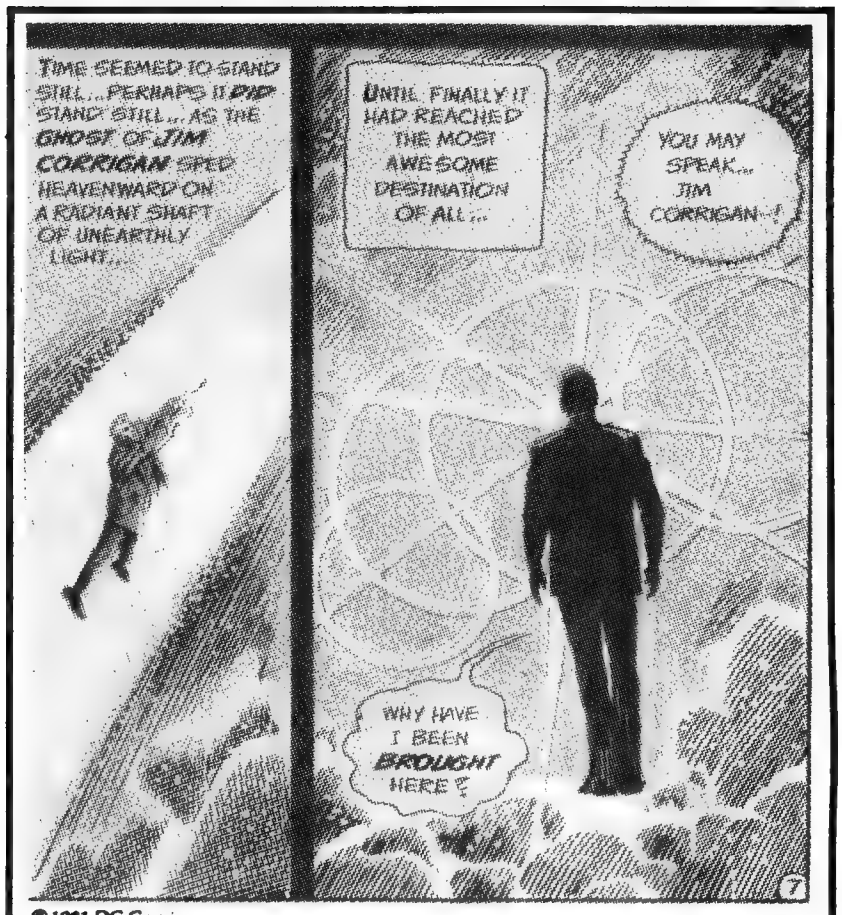
"You are now a being without a place! Neither Heaven nor Hell shall claim you...and that is a damnation worse than you will ever suspect!"

Dracula's powers are restored, but he is indeed a "broken man." In the next issue, he is able to protect three children from a horde of rebel vampires by **himself** weilding a cross against them, and the, after killing an upstart vampire lord, renounces command of his "subjects." Soon after, he is finally killed by Quincy Harker. The angelic Janus, he mission over, separates into his component parts—an angel which returns to Heaven and a living child in Domini's arms.

TOMB OF DRACULA was reborn as a black-and-white series with little of the flair of the foul-color series, and none of the theological implicatons. As it stands, the original TOD deserves nothing but praise as the **best** religon-oriented series in comics. It is a tribute to Wolfman's artistry that such a series could be sustained so long and delve so thoughtfully into the spiritual realm without becoming silly or offensive, and remain within the boundaries of the Code. It will probably **never** be equalled.

Certainly the 1970s **"Spectre"** series never came close.

Revived in 1974 by editor Joe Orlando and writer Michael Fleisher, the Grim Ghost returned from oblivion without explanation—he had discorporated after saving the world in **JUSTICE LEAGUE** in 1970—and became chillingly sadistic, a Mack Bolan from the Next World. The Spectre, instead of preventing evil occurances, settle for punishing the malefactors in imaginative ways: they were cut apart by giant scissors, eaten by a rubber duck grown huge, turned into glass and shattered, turned into wood and sawed into chunks, turned into a store-window dummy and burned in a refuse pile. In one near-nauseating moment, Jim Corrigan, after his girlfriend tries to kill him with a meat cleaver,


TIME SEEMED TO STAND STILL...PERHAPS IT DID STAND STILL...AS THE GHOST OF JIM CORRIGAN SPED HEAVENWARD ON A RADIANT SHAFT OF UNEARTHLY LIGHT...
UNTIL FINALLY IT HAD REACHED THE MOST AWESOME DESTINATION OF ALL...
YOU MAY SPEAK... JIM CORRIGAN...!
WHY HAVE I BEEN BROUGHT HERE?
7

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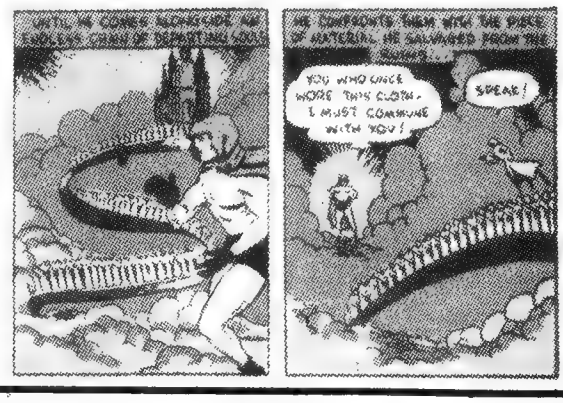
Two of The Spectre's trips to Heaven. Above: Jim Corrigan has been murdered, and he is judged. Below: To track down an arsonist, The Spectre needs the help of the people killed in the blaze.



directs the weapon to hack her to pieces. Only after the grisly job is done does he discover she is a robot mannequin.

The series stands in gruesome contrast to the last issues of the 1960s Spectre. In those stories, it was made clear that Shadow-style killings, even when perpetrated by the mightiest superhero in the universe, were still murder; and, even when empowered by God and equipped with a Journal of Judgement [nowhere in evidence in the 1970s series], The Spectre almost always turned up in time to avert an act of evil, rather than avenging it in a sadistic manner. Several thugs perished at his hands, but quickly and almost mercifully, in the style of an execution rather than a revenge killing. And not **every** story ended with blood on The Spectre's hands; at last twice he was satisfied with merely apprehending the malefactor.

But it appears, at least in the comics universe, that "God" still put his stamp of approval on The

Spectre in the 1970s. In one two-part tale, Jim Corrigan prays for the return of his humanity that he may marry; accordingly, he is snatched up to a higher plane again, has his powers taken away, and is returned to earth. Corrigan gets killed again by mobsters. "God" decides to return The Spectre to circulation, returns him to Earth with his powers intact, and the Grim Ghost's first new act is to kill all the gangsters who rubbed him out, including their leader, who gets devoured by the rubber duck. So much for that.

Interestingly enough, both strains of The Spectre—the merciful guardian and the sadistic avenger—have continued in several stories to the present day. In **JUSTICE LEAGUE #124**, after six members of the Justice Society actually die, The Spectre literally pleads with God [pictured as a point of radiating light in the sky] to return them from the dead. "Ask no longer, My son...for your reasons are good and your heart pure," says the Voice. Naturally, Robin, Hourman, Dr. Mid-Nite, Wonder Woman, Wildcat and Johnny Thunder are resurrected. Political connections, even in the Next World, are nice things to have. Thankfully, The Spectre refrained from any murder-sprees in this story.

In 1980, two disparate Spectre stories by two different creators once again gave us the double-face of DC's Ace of Shades. In a **DC COMICS PRESENTS** story by Jim Starlin, The Spectre, acting as the agent of mercy, shows Superman the limits of his power and teaches him humility. When Supes learns his lesson, God Himself congratulates him ("Aye, my good and faithful son, know that you heart speaks **true**—and **rejoice**!"). In a **GHOSTS** two-parter, though, The Spectre of the Reisher days is back, taking on small-time criminals and forcing one villain to blow his brains out unwillingly. It has been speculated, not without cause, that there are **two** Spectres in the DC universe, but this has as of yet to be established in an actual story. If there are, then it seems to beg the question: who is the other "God"?

Of course, Jim Starlin had tackled religion before, allegorically, in his monumental **"Warlock"** series. Beginning with the naive Christ-figure, Adam Warlock, Starlin played on the inadequacy of untested and uninformed belief/heroism by pitting him against the Antichrist-figure, The Magus, who was none other than Warlock himself, corrupted and yanked from a future world, and more than equal to the challenge of the gold-skinned warrior. Starlin got in more than a few digs at organized religion by making The Magus head of the Universal Church of Truth, patterned on the medieval Catholic Church. His "Pope" was an ex-prostitute, the Matriarch, and most of his conversions were accomplished through military force [convert or get converted to dust]. Warlock only triumphs after the heretic element, Thanos, enters the fray and directs him in what is no less than a time-travel suicide. He is then reduced to a form of agnosticism and becomes more apathetic until the time of his true demise [you will recall he died once before in **THE INCREDIBLE HULK**]. Afterwards, he is able to rise from the dead [or, more accurately, from the Soul Gem] and to destroy Thanos, which he was powerless to do in life. The Magus commented on his Universal Church: "Like most religions, it was created to keep its practitioners in line by threats of damnation and such!"

Likewise, Roy Thomas put in his two cents worth in the "Living Tarim" opus in **CONAN**, wherein a lengthy and bloody war is fought over the human embodiment of a god, whom Conan unmasks as a drooling idiot. The Tarim is killed, but appearances must be kept up, so the cloaked body is tied to a throne in a parade, and not **too** many can see the rotted bones peering out from underneath the hood as the Tarim passes by...

Gerry Conway played with the religion theme for a few issues of **MARVEL TEAM-UP(#33-35)** in which a fanatic religious demagogue yclept "Jeremiah, last true prophet of the Lord!", endowed with mutant psychopowers, led a congregation of dupes in "cleansing the world of sin!" Along the way he fried a couple of cops to ash, speculated that Spiderman was the antichrist, and tried to sacrifice The Valkyrie to "Almighty God." Though he was even willing to make martyrs of his entire following, the Human Torch and Dr. Strange succeeded [as usual] in besting Jeremiah and exiling him to a hellish dimension. Next to Jeremiah, Josiah Dawn looks pretty healthy.

Doug Moench rarely tackled spiritual belief, except for one scene in which Shang-Chi is buttonholed on the street by a Jesus person who tells him to surrender to God. To which Shang replies that **his** God has not **demanded** his surrender. This exchange is punctuated by a Si-Fan dagger which misses Shang's body and ends up embedded in the proselytyzer's back. Meanwhile, Conway, in a **JUSTICE LEAGUE** story, created a phony evangelist and "faith healer" named Simon Elis, who tapped power from Green Lantern's ring to perform his "miracles". In the meantime, he doubled as a super-villain called The Anarchist and kidnapped political figures to create a chaotic atmosphere "so that **you**—as Simon Elis, world-renowned **Messiah**—could step in and cure the earth's ills—by creating a planet-wide dictatorship!"Interesting logic, that. Ah, well, Superman manages to punch out the evil religionist and order and peace are restored to the cosmos again.

But probably the most interesting of the remainder of religiously-oriented comics were found in Marvel's topical-satire mag, **HOWARD THE DUCK**. Steve Gerber played no favorites in his put-

downs [it was hard to tell what he was **for**, after multi-issue deflations of modern society], and that meant the orthodox and the unorthodox were up for grabs. In issue **#6**, he grabbed, with a broad and very funny satire on the Moonie cult: Reverend John Moon Yuc, leader of the Yucchie cult [kids with happy-face T-shirts, for the most part], takes a look at Howard, finds him somewhat out of the ordinary and directs his followers to cover their faces with Bibles and pray for God to strike the duck dead. The proceedings, luckily, are interrupted, but later Yuc is seen to fall down and worship a giant gingerbread Frankenstein.

Several issues later, a bus which Howard is riding on becomes a microcosm for several exponents of "pop" religion. The duck meets with Winda Wester, whose parents think her possessed by the devil since she likes to make funny faces, and have sent her to Cleveland to be exorcised [guess who's the exorcist!]; Alvin, a parody of a Scientologist ["Are your emotions in deep-freeze storage? Is your brain a musty attic, cluttered with intellectual nostalgia?—Yes...yes...I'm getting it...I'm all the way to **transparent**!"]; a Hare Krishna-type [who sports a book entitled "To Sir With Love" and chants "Hare Reasoner! Hare Reasoner!"]; and a Christ figure, whose book is entitled "Martyrdom for the Millions"—"jam-packed with info and **color** photographs!"—and who advises, "You should **love** thy neighbor and be true to thy school," before he gets a boot in the face from the ubiquitous Kidney Lady, who calls him a "dirty **hippie**!" The bus wrecks.

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YOU'RE MAKING A TERRIBLE MISTAKE! IT'S "REVEREND YUC"!
YUC! DO YOU HEAR? YUC! YUC!!
I'M THE SECOND COMING! HE'S JUST A STUPID DUCK!!

Steve Gerber tackles religion in 1970s *HOWARD THE DUCK #6*. Yuc had no qualms about worshipping whatever seemed most po powerful at the moment.

This sequence leads into an off-the-wall series also dealing, peripherally, with religion—or cultism—or pop psychology, all in the same mixed bag and almost distinguishable from one another in this parody. Howard and Winda, committed to an asylum, run afoul of Rev. Yuc again, who attempts to exorcise Winda after she is found to be "possessed" by Kiss. Fair enough. Who should turn up buy Daimon Hellstrom himself, who pronounces her un-deviled ["The **devil**...too often receives credit for the creative behavior of humans."] In combat with Yuc, Hellstrom tries to transform into the Son of Satan. But Yuc, who is also versed in some mysticism, manages to transfer the hero's "second soul" into Howard's body. A two-foot tall duck, caped, fanged, bearing a trident, and with a pentagram emblazoned on his chest, stands revealed... Eventually, Hellstrom reclaims his demonic self and the trident, freeing Howard. But Dr. Reich, ally and sponsor of Rev. Yuc, turns out to be none other than Adolf Hitler. Eventually, the whole gang [Yuc, Reich, "Werner Blowhard" and an Anita Bryant clone called Soofi] turn up in a Bill Mantlo-scripted sequel in a magazine edition of HTD, in which all pay hommage to "Hitler" as the true father of their beliefs and techniques. No missing the point **there**, gang. Later, Howard was found to be the object of a cult's devotion on his homeworld: the "Waccies," financed by evil billionaire Scrounge MacDrake, attempt to control the world through exploitative religion. When Howard protests, they order him shot.

Thor, in a way, finally got involved with religion of sorts when Steve Englehart penned a tale for his 1976 Annual. In between other snatches of action, Thor and Hercules both responded to the prayers of their respective human charges—Vikings and Greeks—and descended to Earth to do battle. The story would seem to legitimize them as genuine gods in a religious sense, as they fulfilled the requirements of answering spiritual pleas. What else is left?

Later on, during the monumental **"Celestials Saga,"** Roy Thomas [and his successors, Ralph Macchio and Mark Gruenwald] played around with metaphysics, but no more seriously than Kirby in **THE NEW GODS** years before [fittingly, since Kirby's **NEW GODS** derivate, **THE ETERNALS**, was grafted onto this tale]. Nonetheless, in issue **#300**, a convocation of gods representing various pantheons [such as Greek, Norse, Hindu, and Indian] were introduced and described as "mortal-worshipped deities." Moreover, Zeus stated that he was "content these centuries past to allow my worship on Earth to dwindle." Such would never have been the case in the mid-sixties, when Stan Lee was at pains to explain that Thor and his cronies were unworthy of worship. Later, a gross distortion of the god Siva battled Thor, probably as true to its namesake as Englehart's Living Buddha.

Probably the silliest manifestation of God-in-comics appeared in **SUPER FRIENDS #38**, in the first solo adventure of The Seraph, a super-hero from Israel. The Seraph, believe it or not, was nothing less than the Jewish version of Captain Marvel, with Yahweh Himself standing in for the an-

...PLEASE HELP ME TO STOP GOLD! ... TO SAVE MY COUNTRY! THE ALIENS MADE ME STRONGER, BUT I'M NOT STRONG ENOUGH! ... I NEED HELP TO BREAK THESE ROPES...
©1981 Comely Comics Inc.

Captain Canuck: Whenever he got in too deep, he would pray for help. He always got it, but never directly; a fortunate coincidence would allow him to break free.

cient Egyptian wizard! Empowered with the staff of Moses, the strength of Samson, the cloak of Elijah and the ring of Solomon, the Semitic Super-hero's first exploit pitted him against a band of thieves, whom he handled none too gently. When he threatened to injure one bandit, The Seraph was told to **"STOP!"** by a disembodied Voice from a golden cloud, who said that he would have his powers stripped from him and could regain them only by repentance. This he did, donning sackcloth and ashes, and was given back his power on the Day of Atonement, complete with an admonishment from the Voice never to misuse his powers again. The story was silly, tasteless, and patently offensive, attempting to raise a super-hero to Biblical status.

Doug Moench's tale in **THOR #303** was more in line with a quality story. The thunder god meets up with a Catholic priest in a Manhattan slum district, saves his life as Don Blake, and learns of the clergyman's struggle against both a local Italian mobster and his own waning faith. Thor lends a hand in bringing the gunsel to bay, while the priest saves a parishioner from his burning church. In a memorable scene, Thor props up a falling wall with a large stone cross to allow Father Coza to escape.

"You **are** a god," decides Coza. "But then, if you... and not Him... has my faith been restored only for me to find that it has been... misplaced?

"There be **many** gods worshipped on this earth, Father Coza, throughout this universe," explains Thor. "They are given truth by the strength of faith and thus, through belief and prayer, all are made true... All spring from the same universal **higher force**. Your faith is **not** misplaced!"

Of course, the only overtly Christian super-hero in comics is Comely's exported Canadian superstar, **CAPTAIN CANUCK**. Created and written by a Mormon, Richard Comely, Canuck was a super-heroic government agent of the Maple Leaf who trounces bad guys and, when in an inescapable fix, prays for deliverance. It works. But not in the style of The Seraph; more likely, Captain Canuck will find the **one loose brick** in a prison cell that can gain him escape, or just **one strand** of a rope binding his arm will break, allowing him to loose the rest of his bonds. Never is it explicitly stated that it is **God** performing these acts, but we are left wondering if they were just quirks of random chance or... something more. Far from being offensive, **CAPTAIN CANUCK** was as effective, in its own way, as **TOMB OF DRACULA**. [How ironic!]

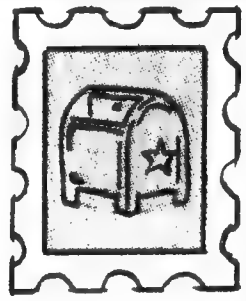
There are and were many other periphally-related religion-oriented stories in comics, such as the old series **"The Deacon"** in **CAT-MAN COMICS** which featured a clergyman as an action-hero; **SKYPILOT**, starring a two-fisted minister who "delivered a powerful sermon, and packed a mighty punch!"; **THE GRIM GHOST, DEVILINA,** and several other short-lived devil-series in the wake of **THE EXORCIST**; Batman and Sgt. Rock's battle with The Devil in **BRAVE AND BOLD**; the unseen Voice that gave The Hawk and The Dove their powers, and was never heard from again; and any number of Warren stories of the 1970s, including **"The Butcher,"** a distasteful story about a priest who dressed up like The Shadow and wiped out the Mafiosi in his congregation with a double-barrelled shotgun while they repented in the confessional box! To enumerate them all would take more space than we have, and more patience, undoubtedly, than you have.

In the past three parts of this series, we've touched on most of the important examples of the handling of religion in comics books. Now that the exhibits have been shown, the arguments, pro and con, and the final decision, will be heard [or at least read] in the next installment.

After all, **no one** expects a comics Inquisition...!

to be concluded

Rich Morrissey graduated from Worcester Polytech and got his law degree at Suffolk. He is a co-founder of Interlac, and has twice been central mailer of CAPA-alpha, as well as the editor and publisher of *BATMANIA*.



CLASSICS OR CLUNKERS?

by Rich Morrissey

It has been argued by many fans, especially recently, that "comic books aren't as good as they used to be." Other people, however [including a great many current professionals], have argued that if the stories published in the 1940s, or even in the early 1960s, were to be published today they'd seem greatly inferior to the current product. They attribute the apparent decline cited by many fans purely to nostalgia; arguing with a great degree of truth that a comic book read at the age of nine or twelve generally **does** seem more exciting, thrilling and original than the same comic book would if the same reader encountered it first as an adult. By extension, this principle has sometimes been applied even to older comics a given reader read for the first time as an adult, on the grounds that the style may seem nostalgic even if the particular story is not.

Even aside from nostalgia, there are so many variable factors that it can often be difficult to reach any definite conclusions as to the state of the industry as a whole. The quality of comic books being published at any one time always varies greatly, and most fans are able or willing to buy, or at least have some familiarity with, a greater range of different titles as they grow older. As a result, many of them have a tendency to compare their childhood favorites with the average title of today, forgetting that if only a few titles today measure up to their old favorites, probably very few in their childhood did either.

In this article, therefore, I'll try to compare different eras of a single character or feature. I'll concentrate on DC titles because those are my main area of interest, and also because that company never made a point of changing its style, or of insisting on a company-wide "house style," as Marvel has done. Nevertheless, I would be very interested in a comparison of Marvel [and Timely] titles over the years, even though I don't consider myself particularly qualified to make such a comparison myself.

One of the enduring heroes of the DC stable, if never a particularly successful one on his own, is Hawkman. A comparison of one of his early adventures and a relatively recent one reveals a shifting emphasis in the very titles: **"The Masked Marauders of Earth"** [by Gardner Fox and Joe Kubert, **BRAVE & BOLD #43**, Aug.-Sept. 1962], and **"Alone"** [by J. Marc DeMatteis, Ken Landgraf, and Armando Gil, **WORLD'S FINEST #264**, Aug.-Sept. 1980]. The first is primarily concerned with a concrete, physical menace [that of the Manhawks, a race of intelligent, masked birds that raid both Hawkman's home planet of Thanagar and his adopted planet Earth], and the latter is more concerned with emotions—those of Hawkman when his wife is almost killed in an accident, and of a time-traveller from an unspecified era who encounters and clashes with the agonized hero.

On the whole, both stories succeed very well in what they try to do, and even in expanding a bit beyond their original parameters. The Fox story does exceptionally well in developing the background of the heroes, the villains, and supporting characters like Commissioner Emmett. In the course of the adventure, we learn some new and interesting facts about Thanagarian society and the origin and background of the flying police force to which both Hawkman and Hawkgirl belong. Fox also subtly establishes the characterizations of Hawkman and Hawkgirl which DeMatteis and his other successors on the feature have continued—two people who are very important to each other both personally and professionally.

And, although DeMatteis is telling what is primarily a "character" story, he adds the action element that [at least in 1962, and to some extent to-

day) is genreally considered even more essential to a super-hero story than characterization. He, too, inserts it well and believably into the plot, with two pages of battle between the time-traveller and some street toughs and two more with him fighting Hawkman. The blend, perhaps, isn't quite as deft as is Fox's use of the same combination in the earlier story, but then DeMatteis has only 40% of the space available to Fox (10 as opposed to 25 pages). Under the circumstances, the only place DeMatteis really falls short of Fox is in his more heavy-handed approach to continuity. Coincidentally, both Hawkman stories are indirectly tied in with their immediate predecessors, but while Fox's continuity flows very naturally (having Commissioner Emmett call Hawkman and Hawkgirl back from Thanagar, where they had spent their previous story, and using the opportunity to establish some facts about the Manhawks' past raids on that planet), DeMatteis devotes the entire first page to irrelevant matters having nothing to do with the current story. This is an example of the "Marvel influence" which has been quite bad for DC, especially in shorter stories like this one in which space is at a greater premium.

The two stories also provide an opportunity to compare certain elements of writing style, as used by Fox and DeMatteis. Comparing page 18 of **"Marauders"** with page 7 of **"Alone"** (chosen at random, but appropriately, since both pages are devoted to the main action of the stories), I find that DeMatteis uses 114 words, as opposed to 102 for

...ENOUGH MEANINGLESS PAIN!
THANK YOU... KATAR HOL...
...AND IT FILLS THE THANAGARIAN SOUL WITH AN INEFFABLE SWEETNESS...
YES - I KNOW WHO YOU ARE...
...I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU...
...FOR WHEN I OPENED MY ESSENCE TO YOU - MY CONSCIOUSNESS EXPLORED YOURS AS WELL!
THE TELEPATHIC VOICE RINGS LIKE A GOLDEN CHIME IN HAWKMAN'S MIND...
©1981 DC Comics

Ken Landgraf and Armando Gil contributed an exaggerated realism to *"Hawkman."*

Fox. Strangely enough, both pages have a total of 51 words of dialogue (including thoughts), but Fox also uses 51 words in his captions, as opposed to DeMatteis' 63. In both stories, the dialogue (and especially the captions) give little information that cannot be inferred from the illustrations, but the copy on both does help to clarify what is taking place—even if both probably could have made it equally clear with fewer words. It's curious that, although Fox was considered an unusually wordy and caption-heavy writer in his day, no such complaints have been made about the even wordier DeMatteis. Indeed, most comics **do** seem to be written in a wordier style now than they were two decades ago, so DeMatteis doesn't stand out now as Fox did then. Comparing the two

DRIVEN TO DESPAIR BY THE SIGHT WHICH CONFRONTS HIM, HE HURTLES WILDLY DOWNWARD - AND CRASHES INTO HER, SCANT INCHES FROM THE STONE EDGE OF A JUTTING ROCK...
DARLING - OH, I THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER MAKE IT!
NOW BEGINS AN UNEQUAL CLASH - STRAIGHT INTO THE TEETH OF RACING DOOM AND DEADLY BEAMS...
©1981 DC Comics

Joe Kubert's 1960s art, however, was more impressionistic.

stories reveals more clearly certain tendencies that have gone too far today, but on the whole both scripts are well- (and professionally-) done.

On the other hand, there's almost no contest with respect to art comparisons: Even in 1962, Joe Kubert was an extremely talented and highly-regarded artist, with a rare ability to render beautifully-detailed figures and backgrounds with only a few lines. Even bearing in mind the decreased opportunities presented by the smaller size of original art used now, it's no damning reflection of Ken Landgraf and Armando Gil that they can't equal Kubert—very few artists could or can—and they turn out a satisfactory job on **"Alone"**'s art.

To be sure, Hawkman wasn't **quite** as secondary a character at the time of his **BRAVE & BOLD** story as he was when the **WORLD'S FINEST** adventure appeared. At the time of the first story, his editor and publisher had higher hopes for him, and this and other **BRAVE & BOLD** appearances were experiments to see if he could successfully receive his own title. (Which he eventually did, although it didn't last very long.) It might, therefore, be considered slightly unfair to expect as high standards of his later adventures as of his early ones.

This argument is only valid, however, if one accepts as inevitable that a back-up feature **should** have lower standards than a lead or title feature. Although this is often considered to be the case today, the ab-

SO YOU'RE THE MURDERER! THAT'S WHAT WE WERE TRYING TO BLUFF OUT OF DIPPER WHEN WE ACCUSED HIM OF MURDER.
GOOD HEAVENS! THAT MUST BE WHY YOU DISREGARDED MY LETTER!
SO YOU WERE THE ONE THAT SENT IT! AND BECAUSE WE PAID NO ATTENTION, YOU RESCUED DIPPER!
YES, I THOUGHT YOU WERE TRYING TO FRAME HIM!
©1981 DC Comics

The art on the Golden Age *Green Arrow"* was "competent but unspectacular."

sence of this notion in earlier times—and, indeed, the very ambiguity of the distinction between lead and back-up stories—is aptly demonstrated by examination of two stories featuring another long-running DC character, Green Arrow.

Neither **"Million + Murder = Zero"** [by a writer and artist I can't identify, **MORE FUN COMICS #107**, Jan.-Feb. 1946] nor **"What Can One Man Do?"** [by Elliot Maggin, Neal Adams and Dick Giordano, **GREEN LANTERN #87**, Dec. 1971-Jan. 1972] are cover stories, but Green Arrow's tale is the lead feature in the **MORE FUN** issue, while the **GL/GA** story is at least blurbed on its cover, so they seem to have had a consistent, though limited, amount of sales value.

As with the Hawkman stories, the emphasis of the early story is on action and the second one concentrates on emotion and characterization, but neither is at all deficient in either regard. **"Million + Murder = Zero"** deals with Professor Million, a former [now reformed] adversary of Green Arrow [and GA's sidekick Speedy] and the professor's misguided return to crime on behalf of an erstwhile associate whom he considers to have been unjustly treated by the law. Million correctly concludes that Green Arrow and the police were holding and prosecuting an innocent man, unaware that their actual intention was to use the threat of prosecution to force him to identify the real murderer. As a result, the Professor, his cohorts, and the prisoner end up breaking several more laws in the course of a jailbreak, and only Green Arrow's intervention saves them from death at the hands of another of Million's men who turns out to be the real murderer. It is hinted that the law would go easy on the others in exchange for their testimony, but the story nevertheless raises profound questions about conflicts between personal loyalty and civil rights, and the protection of society—even if neither the unknown writer nor Green Arrow [as idle playboy Oliver Queen who dabbles in costumed heroics] considered them to any great extent—very few people in 1946 did.

Society had progressed a great deal by 1972, and Green Arrow progressed right along with it. The loss of his fortune a few years before had given him a new direction in life, and no longer did he ignore any of the myriad injustices and violations of individual rights present in society, even if they were sanctioned or even encouraged by the legal authorities. Neither would he permit anyone else to ignore them, and, despite second billing in the title, he often seemed to be both the magazine's true star and Green Lantern's unofficial conscience.

In his first of many stories for the comics, Elliot Maggin captured Green Arrow's personality perfectly. GA was at least as dedicated a foe of genuine crime as he ever was, but his sympathy for reluctant, basically honest people like Professor Million has become stronger than ever. A bystander remarks at one point that "If not for that 'show-off,' my brother'd be in jail now." As GA continues around Star City, he fills much of the requisite quota of action with minor but significant aid to the little guy, such as saving a boy's dog from a rushing train. As he himself observes, it's not as glamorous as fighting off a super-villain or a bug-eyed monster, but, as the title asks, what **can** one man do?

A great deal, possibly. As he returns home, he's offered the opportunity to be in a position to help a great many more people—by running for Mayor of Star City. Quite a departure for a super-hero, and all his Justice League friends try to talk him out of it—but after experiencing still more violence and personal tragedy [the death of a young black boy who idol-

ized him] he makes the decision that his past experience has been leading him toward, and accepts the nomination. This is not only a classic story, but features art by one of the best artistic teams of all time [Neal Adams and Dick Giordano] which was as far—or even farther—above the competent-but-unspectacular art in **MORE FUN #107** as Joe Kubert was above Ken Landgraf. This story seems to be proof positive that even "second-string" heroes aren't always neglected.

Unfortunately, **"What Can One Man Do,"** although the sort of story the best of today's writers are still trying to do, is far from representative of today's Green Arrow. Just as Oliver Queen's own campaign was sabotaged by the same fellow heroes who originally discouraged it [Superman finally persuaded him to withdraw from the race the first time, and the second time his own lover, Black Canary, acquiesced in a fraud that lost him the election in an attempt at protecting him], so were his idealism and originality damaged by his editorial staff and the steadily declining quality of writers and artists they assigned him. In 1972 it was still possible for a secondary character to receive superior handling; by 1980 it was all but impossible. The same **WORLD'S FINEST** issue from which I drew the DeMatteis/Landgraf **"Hawkman"** story [**#264**] also contains a new **"Green Arrow"** adventure by Bob Haney, Trevor von Eeden, and Vince Colletta, **"Any Number Can Lose."** Its plot is interesting but rather trivial; with almost as much space as the 1946 story [8 pages as opposed to 10] the only difficulty Green Arrow has during it is in proving some charges he made [as Oliver Queen] that a new casino has underworld connections. Not at all surprisingly, he does. What characterization there is is even shallower than the strip had in its **MORE FUN** days; the relationship between Oliver and his boss is straight out of the old **LOIS LANE** stories, with George Taylor suspecting Green Arrow's true identity and trying to prove it. At least Trevor von Eeden's pencils were a cut above what Green Arrow had in 1946, but by the time Vince Colletta got through with them there was very little to recommend the art. If anything, Green Arrow's example makes the general decline of quality in secondary characters even more clear.

But what of the more successful characters—those who, then as now, were the unquestioned stars of the titles in which they appeared? Success with the general public isn't always simultaneous with success among fans, but, of those characters who have been lucky enough to receive both, the most enduring is probably The Batman. In his case, I've deliberately chosen two stories that a great majority of fans consider to be among the very best of their respective eras—**"The Case of the Honest Thief"** [by Bill Finger and Bob Kane, **BATMAN #5,** Spring 1941, reprinted in **BATMAN #241**, May 1972]

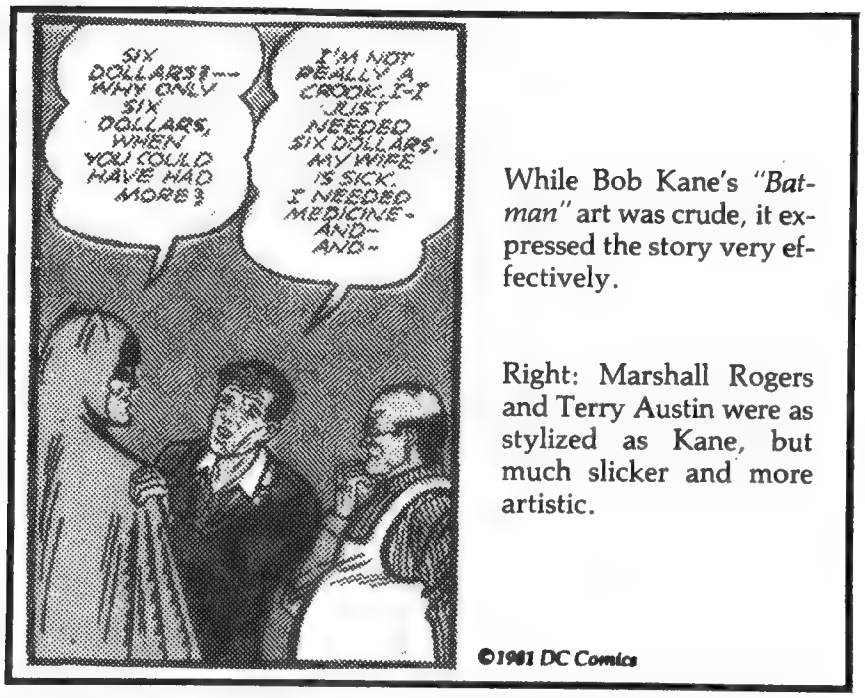
...AS IS THIS HERO-AMONG-MEN STUNNED, ACTING BY INSTINCT BEFORE HE HAS FULLY REALIZED WHAT HAS HAPPENED...
...CARRYING THE YOUNG BOY TO AN AMBULANCE... ONE OF MANY ON THE PERIPHERY... WAITING!
©1981 DC Comics

In the 1970s, though, Neal Adams and Dick Giordano, one of the most acclaimed art teams ever in comics, brought a new, dynamic style to the strip.

and **"The Dead Yet Live"** and **"I Am the Batman"** [a continued story by Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers, and Terry Austin, **DETECTIVE COMICS #471-2**, August and September 1977].

And interestingly enough, there's more resemblance between these two stories, though published over 36 years apart [and technically, according to the separated DC continuity, not even dealing with the same characters but with parallel-world counterparts] than we have seen with Hawkman and Green Arrow over far shorter periods of time. Both stories are this time more concerned with people and personal relationships than with the actual crimes they become involved with—in particular love, trust and dedication [not only between romantic partners, but also, in both series, between The Batman and his partner Robin], and factors that lead even basically decent people into crime. The two stories also raise an important question that very few others have; what are Batman and Robin to do when injured beyond their own [or their butler Alfred's] medical abilities?

In the Finger story, it is Robin who is injured in the course of investigating the case of Joe Sands, who had been framed on a drunken-driving charge by gangsters determined to discredit a possible witness. His life had been ruined, to the point where he was forced to steal to pay for his wife's urgently-needed medicine. The Batman and Robin set out to apprehend the real criminals, and when Robin is beaten up and critically injured, The Batman is forced to do the only thing he can to obtain medical help—rushing to the house of the first doctor he can find and


SIX DOLLARS!— WHY ONLY SIX DOLLARS, WHEN YOU COULD HAVE HAD MORE?
I'M NOT REALLY A CROOK, I— I JUST NEEDED SIX DOLLARS. MY WIFE IS SICK. I NEEDED MEDICINE— AND— AND—
©1981 DC Comics

While Bob Kane's *"Batman"* art was crude, it expressed the story very effectively.

Right: Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin were as stylized as Kane, but much slicker and more artistic.

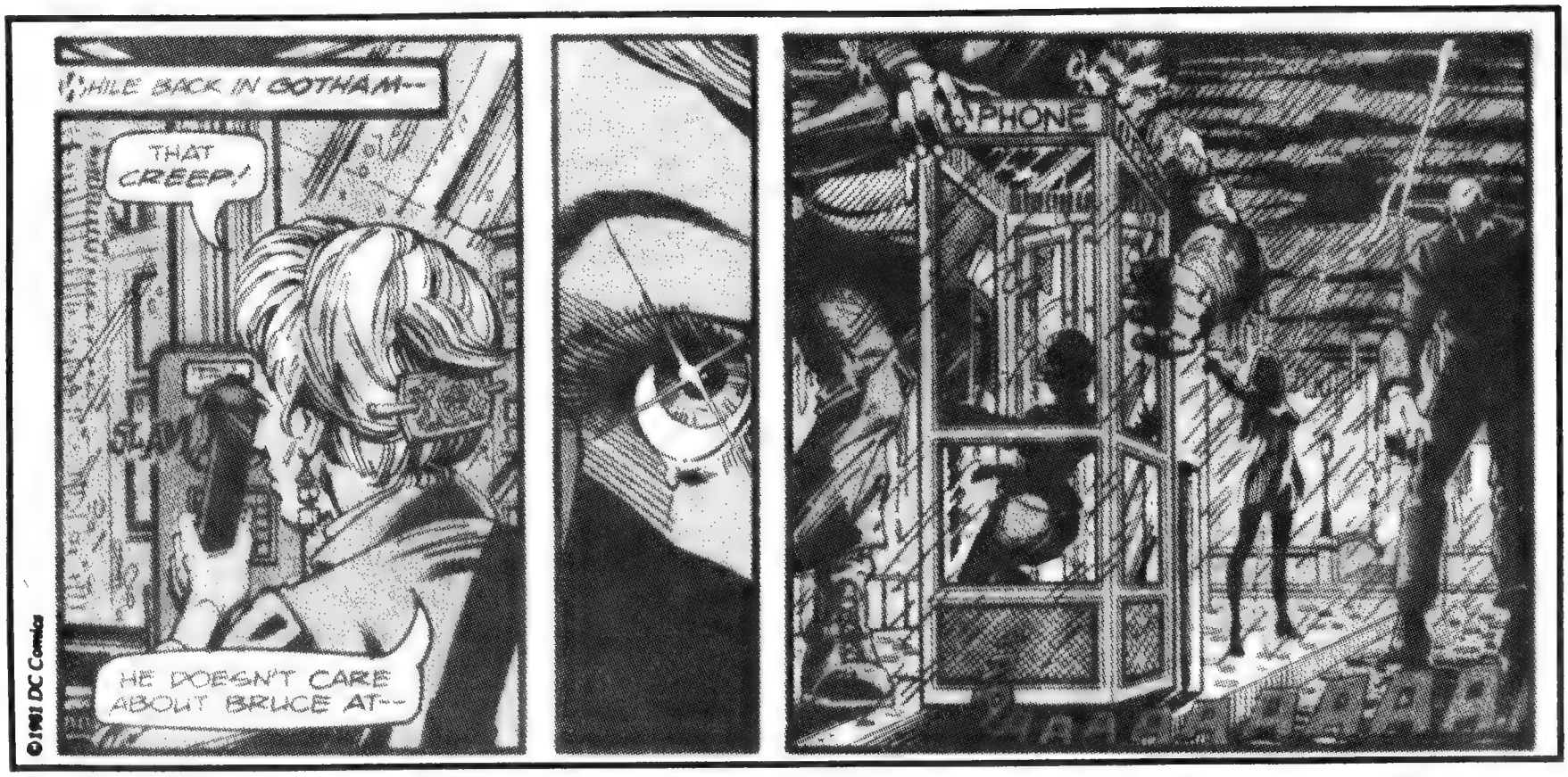
threatening him into operating. He then sets out alone to capture the man who ordered the beating of Robin and the framing of Sands, and forces him to sign a confession [a valid one, too; this being before the landmark Supreme Court decision forbidding the use of coerced confessions in court]. He then turns the gangster and the confession over to the police, all in a state of fury and disregard for bullets and other injuries that even the police remark on it. Not until he returns to the doctor and learns that Robin will recover does he collapse from pain and relief. All ends happily—the doctor respects the anonymity of both Batman and Robin and doesn't look at their faces, Sands is cleared and gets a job, and his wife also recovers from her illness. In 13 pages, Finger squeezes in more plot and characterization than many writers have managed in many times that space, leaving the reader with the good feeling that there are enough good and idealistic people in this world to [at least sometimes] overcome the forces of injustice.

Steve Englehart made superlative use of **his** 34 pages, though—he was able to focus much more sharply on his different characters, to the extent that [as many readers were surprised to realize] The Batman himself hardly appeared at all in the second issue. In this case, it is Batman's own injuries [obtained during an earlier case] that provide the springboard for the story. As Bruce, he checks into what he believes to be a private and completely confidential clinic, but it turns out instead to be a front for a scheme to gain control of and money from the clinic's exclusive clientele. The director of the clinic [Professor Hugo Strange] learns The Batman's identity and imprisons him, his new plan being to convert all of Bruce Wayne's assets into cash and then abscond with a fortune. The plan, as Strange himself claims, is almost totally perfect, and is only thwarted by a vague suspicion on the part of Bruce's girlfriend, Silver St. Cloud. She conveys her suspicions to Bruce's ward Dick Grayson, who investigates as Robin, smashes the clinic scheme, and rescues The Batman. As for Professor Strange himself, he attempts to sell Batman's secret identity to the underworld, only to be captured by a gangster determined to set his own terms. "Boss" Rupert Thorne attempts to beat the secret out of Hugo Strange, but succeeds only in killing the criminal professor, who carries his adversary's secret to the grave with him rather than betray it.

At first glance, the calculating and brilliant Hugo Strange would seem to have little in common with the honest, cruelly victimized Joe Sands, although he is a villain of comparable vintage. He, or rather his otherworld counterpart, had battled The Batman of **"The Case of the Honest Thief"** even before there was a Robin, at one time driving him to the rare practice of using a machine gun on his monstrous underlings. But, just as The Batman of today has never used a gun against his adversaries, the Hugo Strange of Englehart's story has his own concept of fair play. He respects and even admires The Batman, to the extent that he deliberately transfers his schemes from Europe [where he had no serious opposition] to Gotham City, where he knows very well he will eventually have to face The Batman. Although he claims that "Evil, to me, is an end in itself," that evil is limited—his crimes are decidely non-lethal, and he regrets and never follows through his original plan of killing the helpless Batman. Ultimately, he is as much a victim of the far greater injustices of organized crime as Joe Sands was. Unlike Sands, he does not survive, having gone much farther down the path of evil—but he, unlike "Smiley" Sikes and "Boss" Thorne, hasn't gone so far that he cannot redeem himself, even from near [and even beyond] the grave.

Which is not to say that either story is perfect, although both come very close. The stereotyped characters [especially the gangsters, not one of whom has any redeeming qualities] are even closer to cardboard in the Finger story, but given the lack of space I can only compliment Finger, like Englehart, on the amount of characterization each managed to insert. The increased continuity of the more recent stories is a great boon to Englehart in that regard, but it also renders each individual story, even a continued one, less complete. By the end of **DETECTIVE #472**, the reader never does learn if Batman's injuries were healed, or perhaps aggravated by his confinement in Strange's clinic. It wasn't revealed until **#473** that Strange's treatment **did** put him back in fighting shape, and by then it was only as a brief coda to a story that was otherwise complete in two issues. On the other hand, elements like the fact that The Batman **had** been injured in an earlier story, and the final defeat of Thorne in a later one [in which, it was hinted, Hugo Strange's ghost played a part] are examples of continuity at its best.

On the other hand, the art of the two stories



shows at a glance the progress of 36 years. The stylized team of Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin conveyed Englehart's stories in these two issues [and the following four] to near-perfection, and established an exemplary level of quality for comic books. On the other hand, **"The Case of the Honest Thief"** was drawn by Bob Kane, the original creator of The Batman [with some help from writer Bill Finger], whose imagination far exceeded his artistic abilities. In a short time after the success of his creation, Kane abandoned the art almost completely in favor of a long succession of "ghost" artists, but in 1941 he was still drawing many of the stories, including this one, by himself. Kane's crude, often badly proportioned figures are all too clear in **"Thief,"** although there are indications that he did have some help, at least on inking. [A hotel named after inker George Roussos is shown on the second page, and the frequent use of circular panels may indicate the work of Mort Meskin as well.] This would seem a true indication of the advantages of the more restricted assignment of artists usually seen today—if the less important characters like Hawkman and Green Arrow now receive inferior art, at least the proven successes like The Batman will thereby receive superior art, and no longer have to endure the crude renderings of Bob Kane and his ilk.

Yet even as clear-cut a case of progress as this is open to serious question. For one thing, it has been reported that there were strong objections in the DC hierarchy to the assignment of Rogers and Austin to The Batman; objections regarding lack of experience and other factors unrelated to the appearance of the final story [as these same people had no objection to other Batman artists such as Irv Novick and Ernie Chan, generally considered to be far less appropriate to the character]. Even more important, Rogers and Kane are stylistically not far apart—comparing the two stories more closely will reveal a great many aspects of similarity, particularly in panel layouts, the sizes and placement of captions and lettering, and the basic design of characters. The fact that Rogers is more gifted artistically than is Kane fails to preclude a careful observer from concluding that Rogers really owes a very great deal to Batman's creator, and in many of the younger artist's most successful motifs he is doing no more than following the lead of his distant predecessor. Kane may have been crude, but he put that crudity to work in developing a more stylized approach to art and storytelling than that used by other comics—an approach that was improved and refined by such assistants as Roussos, Meskin and Jerry Robinson.

It's quite true that Bob Kane wasn't, by most standards, a very good artist. None of the numerous other strips he drew [or wrote] is remembered today except by comic book scholars and trivia buffs. But he had his own vision on The Batman, a vision that is partially traceable to other sources [notably Chester Gould's comic strip **DICK TRACY**], but in many ways is uniquely his—and Batman's—own. For all too brief a time this vision was restored by Rogers, who, although receiving more attention from the fans of his day than Kane did, has also yet to repeat his spectacular success on any other features. The very rarity of such a perfect combination of writer, artist and character that most strips are fortunate to achieve once [and The Batman has achieved several times] is, when all is said and done, yet another argument in favor of some more experimentation on all characters than is generally encouraged by DC [and Marvel] today.

peter pan

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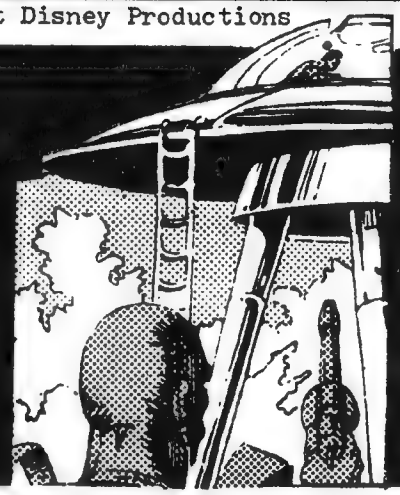

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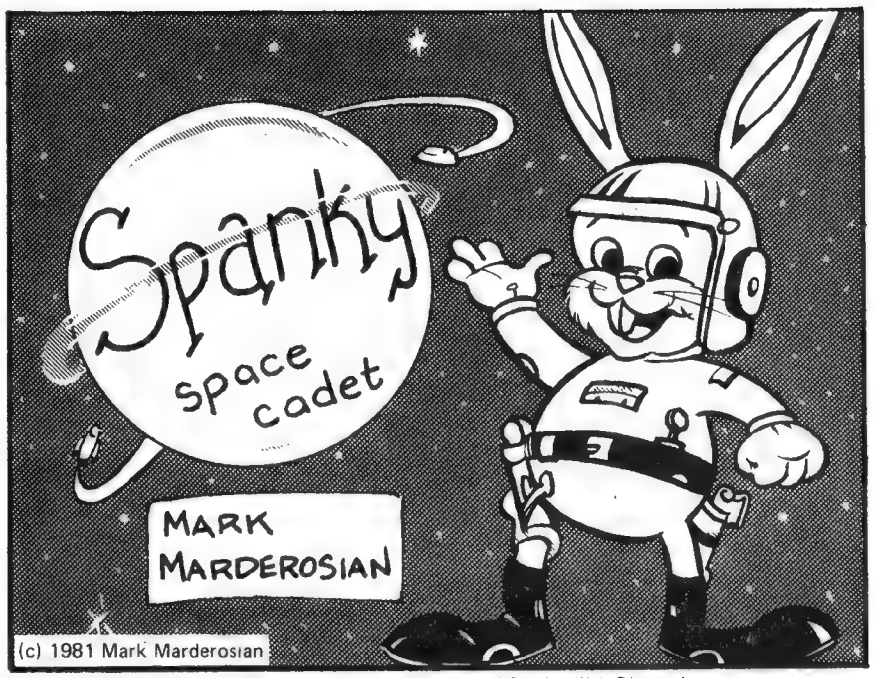

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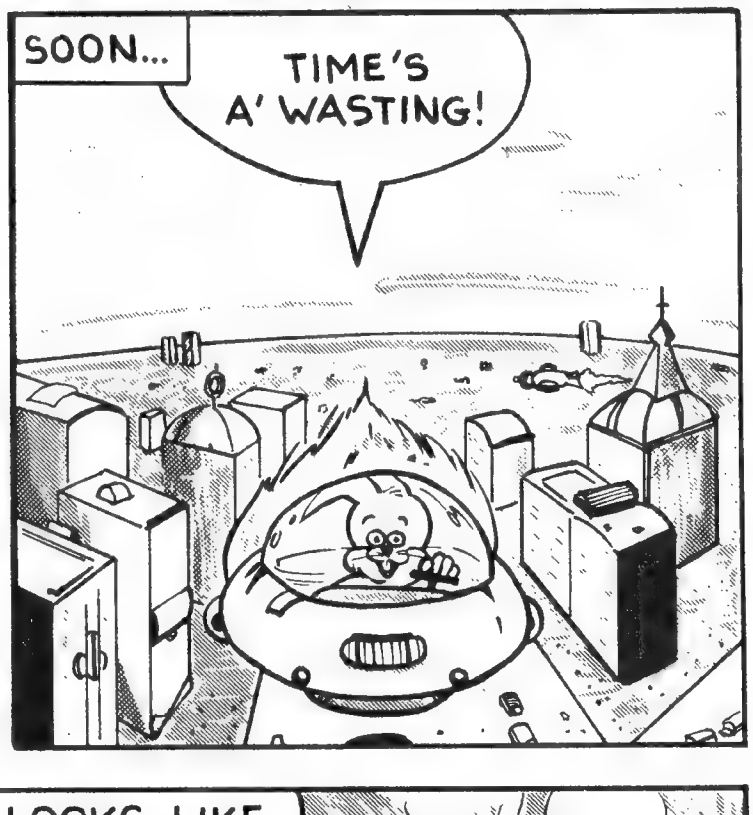
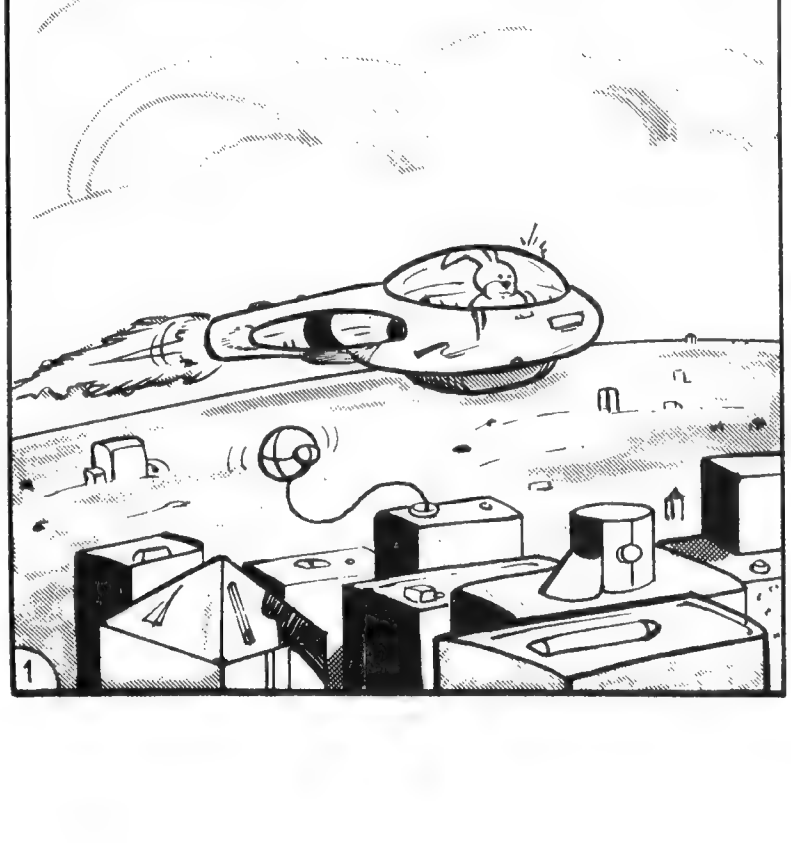
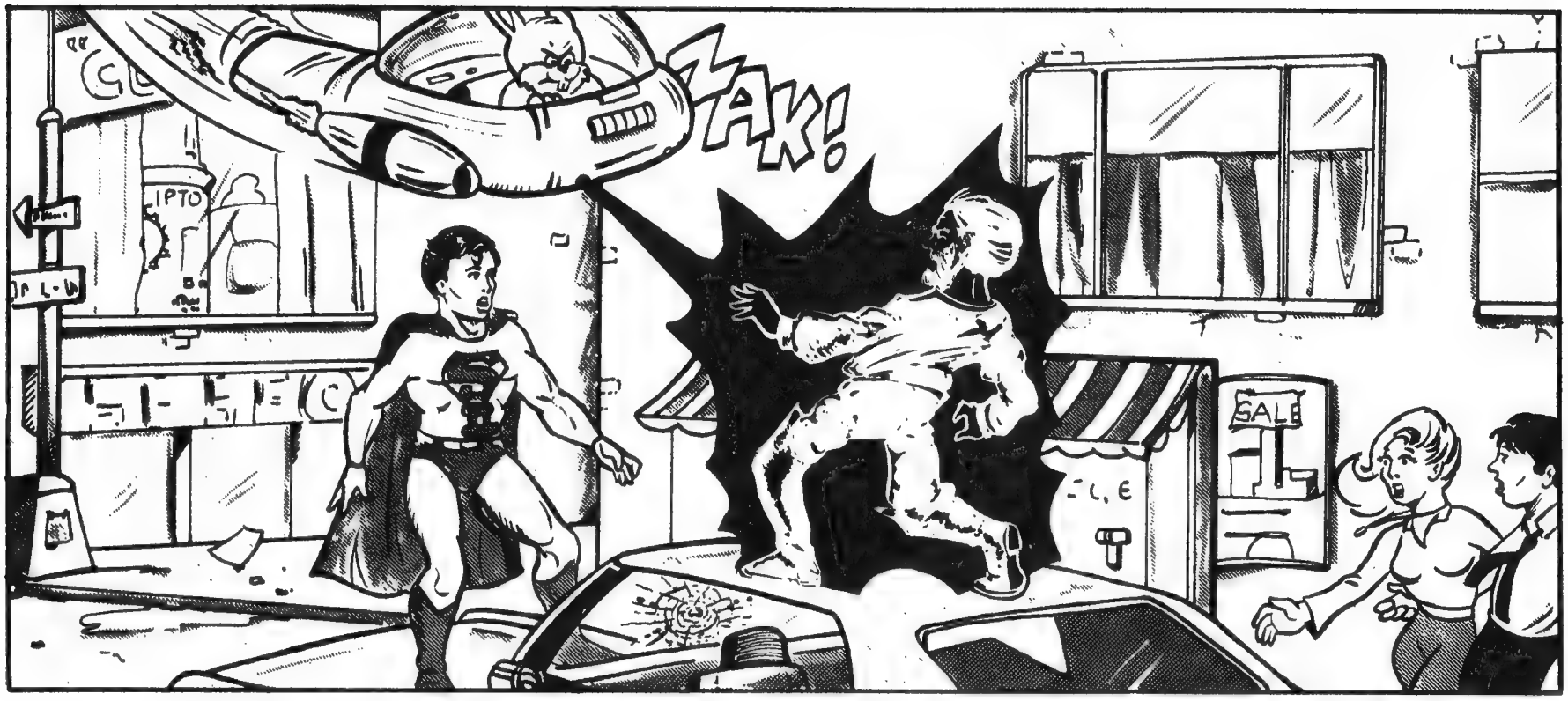
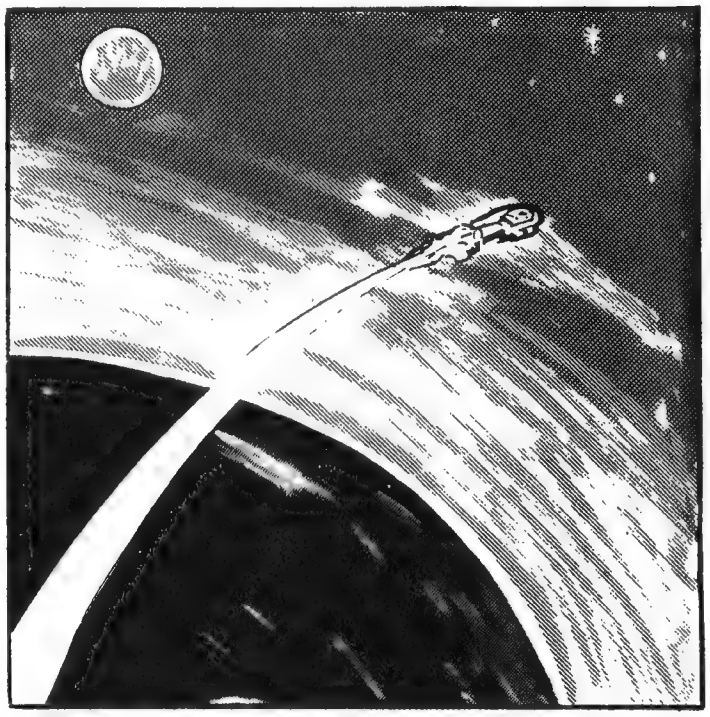
SPANKY, OUR TWENTY-YEAR-OLD KELTON ENERGY CRYSTALS ARE NEAR TOTAL DRAINAGE! PLEASE RACE TO THE PLANET KELTON FOR MORE!
YES SIR, MR. PRESIDENT!

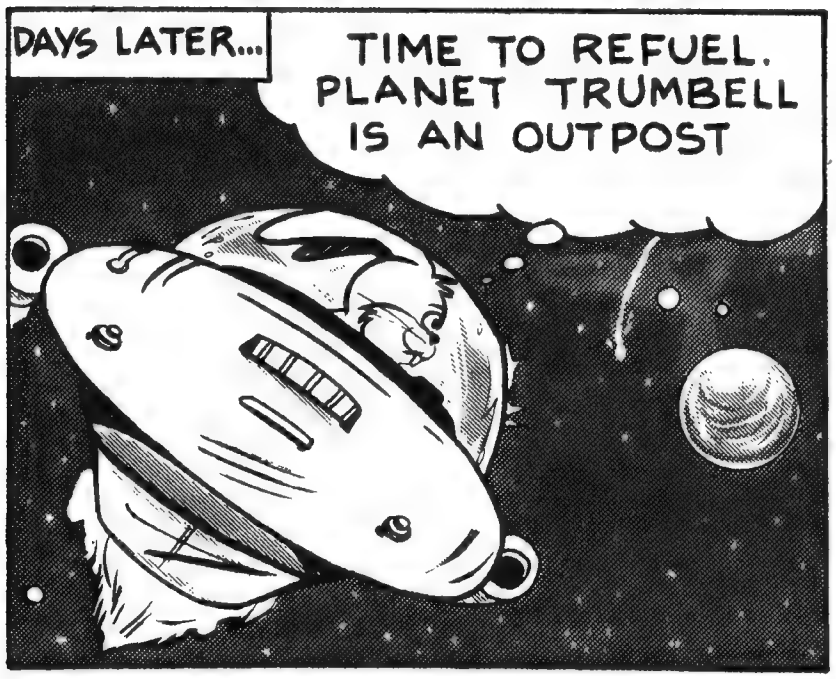


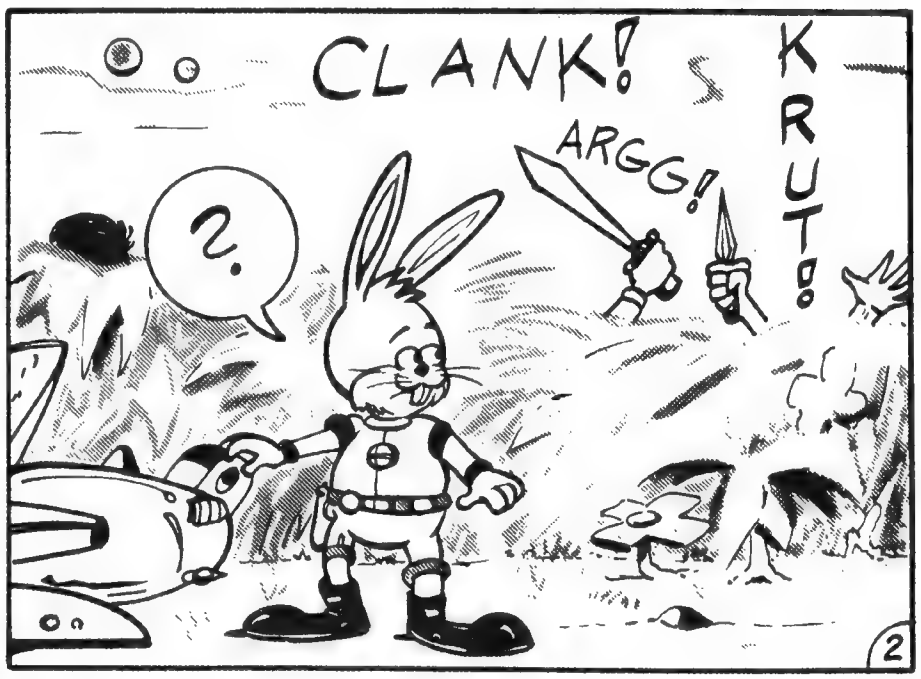



ZAK!
IPTO
SALE

THANKS, SPANKY!
DRUG
NO NEED TO THANK ME. WE'RE PART OF THE SAME TEAM!




DAYS LATER...
TIME TO REFUEL. PLANET TRUMBELL IS AN OUTPOST


CLANK!
KRUT!
ARGG!
?
2

CROM!

MEANWHILE, ON THE PLANET KELTON, MORE EVIL AWAITS OUR HERO...

WHAT IS THY BIDDING, MY MASTER?

THERE IS A GREAT DISTURBANCE IN THE FORCE. WE HAVE A NEW ENEMY...*SPANKY*

IF HE COULD BE TURNED, HE WOULD BECOME A POWERFUL ALLY!

CAN IT BE DONE?

HE WILL JOIN US...

...OR DIE!

MEANWHILE...

YOU'RE THE LAST, MERCENARY!

CIMMERIAN DOG! NO ONE WILL EVER SLAY...

BARBARIAN HUEY!

A VERY TIDY JOB!

SPANKY!

HUEY, I NEED YOUR HELP. MY FUEL PODS ARE EMPTY

I WILL GLADLY AID YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY, MY FRIEND!

GREAT! THEY'RE RIGH-

HEY, NO! NOT THIS WAY! WAIT!

BZZZZZZ!

DAMN!

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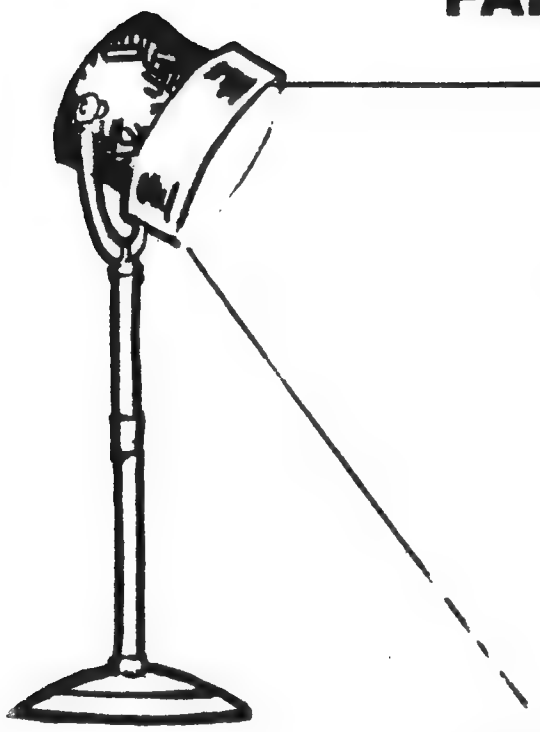


AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER SANDERSON

Peter Sanderson is well-known as one of fandom's leading intellectuals. Rather than simply accept the companies' standards as they have defined them, Sanderson carefully considers the content, giving constructive criticism where due and praise equally where due. It is not enough for a comic to look good; it must be *readable*. To Sanderson, the medium is as worthy of attention as any other. In this interview, he explains his feelings.

LOC: Peter, as a literature student, you have applied a good many of the academic traditions to your comics analysis. Do you think that's an appropriate application of scholarly technique? Do you think comics would benefit from it?

SANDERSON: Why, Ms. Kalish, you're not going to say it's just comics, are you?

LOC: It's just comics, Peter!

SANDERSON: I was afraid you were going to say that.

LOC: Why aren't they just comics?

SANDERSON: First of all, I don't believe in applying academic standards to all comics material, simply because most comics material, like most material in any creative medium, is just simple entertainment. But I feel that when there is a story or a series in the comics medium that has enough depth in characterization or that has thematic content of sufficient depth that applying academic techniques to comics is perfectly appropriate. It is my belief that there are series of stories that do merit this kind of attention. In my article for **ARTFORM #1**, I discuss my reasons for this belief more fully, on a theoretical basis. In my articles for **COMICS FEATURE**, I usually try to deal with examples of stories and series that I feel should be considered in this fashion and why they are important.

I think that throughout this century, we have accumulated an enormous heritage of very worthwhile material in the cartoon medium, in comic strips, comic books, one panel cartoons (whether they're gag cartoons for magazines like **THE NEW YORKER** or editorial cartoons), and animated cartoons. I also feel that the merit of this work has been dismissed by most mainstream scholars, that people tend to say "It's just comics." They assume that because the comics they remember reading as children may have been just juvenile fare that all comics and cartoons must be the same. As I say in **ARTFORM**: you can't say that the medium has yet developed its Shakespeare or its Tolstoy, but there **are** many works that do illuminate the human condition, that do go beyond just providing a good time. I am often amazed that some of the cartoons I saw when I was much younger continue to reveal new depth to me. They gather more emotional response as I become older and that I see more in them today now that I'm in my late twenties than I did when I was in my sub-teens. These works have a meaning and a power inherent in them, and it is my duty as a critic to explore this meaning for myself, probe whatever levels there may be that are not immediately obvious, and to share my discoveries with my audience in the hope that they, too, can ap-

preciate it, that they will see things in it that would perhaps otherwise escape their notice. I also hope that perhaps it will encourage people now working in the medium to aim for the excellence in style and content that the masterful works of the past have achieved.

LOC: You've often indicated [and actually outright said] in a few of your articles that oftentimes writers and artists are not aware of the actual meanings behind their work, that there's a lot more to the interpretative significance of their themes and their plots and their characters than they themselves would [or could] see.

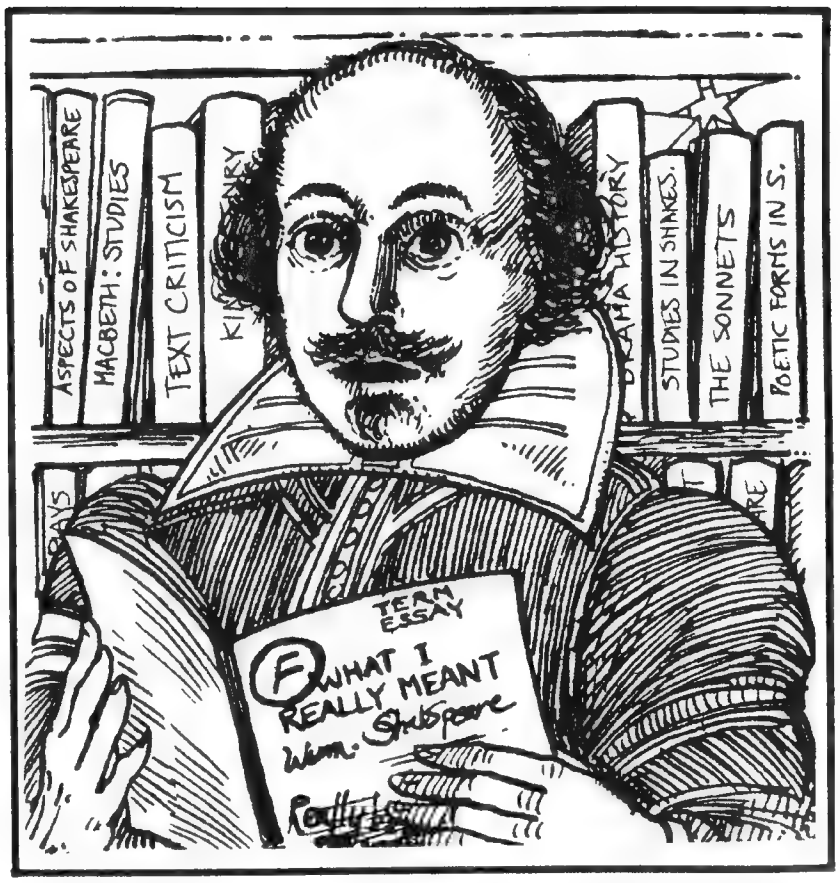
SANDERSON: Oh, yes. There's a story by Isaac Asimov in which Shakespeare is brought to the present via a time machine, and enrolls in a course on his works, and fails. The point is that he did not realize, and could not possibly realize, all the levels of meaning that he put in his own work. You could fill an enormous library full of books that have been written on his works, and it's impossible that one man could have thought of all that. Yet, it is all implicit in his work. Now, to different extents this applies to any artist. An artist often works through intuition; things come out through his subconscious that he is not aware of. He may try to construct a story in a certain way because it feels right to him to do it this way. Often, a writer will say that the story wrote itself; he tried to make the characters do something, but they did something else. That writer is admitting that there are areas in a story beyond conscious control. The work, in a sense, transcends it.

But again, I want to emphasize that the problem about taking material in the comics medium seriously, is that people look at the simplest material and say, "That's just comics. You're being intellectually deceitful if you're trying to find deep meaning there." I'm talking about a fraction of the works. People who follow my writing in **COMICS FEATURE** will notice that I am not writing about every Marvel or DC comic. In fact I usually write about material outside mainstream comic books. I write about the works I consider to be worthy of in-depth analysis.

LOC: I've found that most of your writing seems to take a very positive view on comics. You're picking the things you feel are examples of the best in the medium. Do you think that negative reviews attacking the failures of the medium contribute anything to the particular field?

SANDERSON: Well, there are two kinds of negative reviews. I don't think most people realize this. There are the kind of negative reviews that I have done at times, which I write when I feel a character or series is being so mishandled that it's downright offensive.

LOC: Or would benefit from constructive criticism?



SANDERSON: Yes. I do not believe in just saying something is bad. One has to explain why something is wrong, and one has to try to give an alternative. For example, I did one piece in one of the "End Notes" columns about the way various characters were being mishandled. The "Red Kryptonite" piece. **[CF #5]** You'll notice that even when I'm doing a very negative article, I'm trying to put in some sort of wit to balance it so it doesn't sound like someone shouting at the top of his lungs, in a hysterical fit of rage. You have to be calm, and analytical. You have to try to lighten the tone, and you have to keep away from personal invective. I wrote that article because I felt that various characterizations had been twisted in radically wrong ways, and that that had to be stopped, that the damage had to be repaired or else these particular characters would be destroyed: Madame Masque, for example. But I think people realize, if I've written well enough, that that kind of article was written not out of hatred. It's written out of a love for the characters, and a refusal to see them distorted, or love for the series and a refusal to see them distorted, because of my realization that good things can come out of these series, and these characters.

Then there are the negative reviews in which one is simply writing about stories that are just mediocre: saying this story was bad because it lacked a climax here, or the dialogue was wooden, or it's not as good as the series was back a few years ago. It's not very interesting to write about that sort of thing.

I prefer to spend my time, not merely acting as a reviewer, saying this story is good or bad and why: I

see myself more as a critic, which is different. When I choose a topic, to write about, it's usually a series that's interested me for a good long while and that I'd like to take the time to think about, to concentrate on, and to explain to myself what makes the series work thematically. Why is it so thrilling? Why do the characters appeal to me so much? Or, in the case of a comedy strip, what is it that's so funny about it? What kind of style of humor is it. How does the creator succeed in being so funny? Often one finds with the better works that they derive their power from their creators' insights into human character and the human condition. These are things in comics that I want to investigate for myself, so that when I pick an article, it's a learning experience for me. I'm not doing this just to sit on a high pedestal, and say this is good, this is bad. I am an investigator rather than a judge. I am trying to learn from writing these pieces.

LOC: So you actually do most of your pieces for yourself, rather than to educate a larger community of...

SANDERSON: Primarily for myself. If other people can benefit from them, that's fine. I don't get any feedback from these articles, really, at all. So I have no idea of how they are received by fandom readership. When I have written an article and I feel I have learned something important about the strip or the book by doing so or about a body of a particular men's work, then I feel I have succeeded, I have accomplished something. It's nice to hear from other people who say it was a good article, and that they learned something from it, but it's not of primary importance whether I hear from them or not.

LOC: Do you think commercial comics can consistently provide you with the type of high quality comics you're searching for? Or would you be content with an industry that only periodically could manage to scrape together the competence and the craftsmanship and the vision necessary to produce them?

SANDERSON: I'm well aware that Marvel and DC between them publish scores of comics each month. I know that all the people there who write and draw comics are not equally talented, and that when someone is writing or drawing two or three books a month, you can't expect every one to be a winner. The ieal state would be if that every comic book would be perfect. But there are enough series in the past and the present that have been introduced at Marvel and DC that have kept to a very high level...to prove that good work can be done on a regular basis.

LOC: Along with providing good fun...

SANDERSON: Providing good fun... and giving you more than that, too. I've seen lots of examples in the past. I know it's unrealistic to expect everything to be like that, but I see no reason why I can't expect a good proportion of the work put out by any comics company, any comic strip syndicate, or any animation studio, to meet my standards.

LOC: Then why don't they? What's your opinion of the major downfall of quality in today's comics?

SANDERSON: I really don't know if I could comment on that because there are lots of people who put a great deal of effort into what they do, but it just isn't good enough. Perhaps some of them are doing their best or think they are but they rarely or never produce anything that's really going to be memorable.

LOC: But why would the companies publish work like that?

SANDERSON: Because it's serviceable and it sells, and it meets a certain standard of competence, and a lot of people enjoy it. It just doesn't appeal to me.

LOC: So you don't think that the actual company or the actual industry has an obligation to better itself?

SANDERSON: I'd like to see the comic book companies and syndicates have standards that I would consider to be higher, in that they would do more to encourage and guide their creative personnel to produce the kind of work that I most respect. To a certain extent, it's out of their control. You can't expect, say, a new Jack Kirby to show up at the comic book companies every two years, right?

LOC: Well, you never know...

SANDERSON: But I would hope that comics creators have enough respect for their audience and for themselves to continually strive to better their work, and I would like to think that there is an audience out there that will respond favorably to such efforts.

THE QUESTIONS FOR THE FIRST ISSUE OF...

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COMMENTARY ON SEQUENTIAL ART

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does the New X-Men's foe, ARCADE, have in common with Hannah Arendt's EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM?

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would a serious scholar attempt to prevent his study of the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES from being "mere opinion?"

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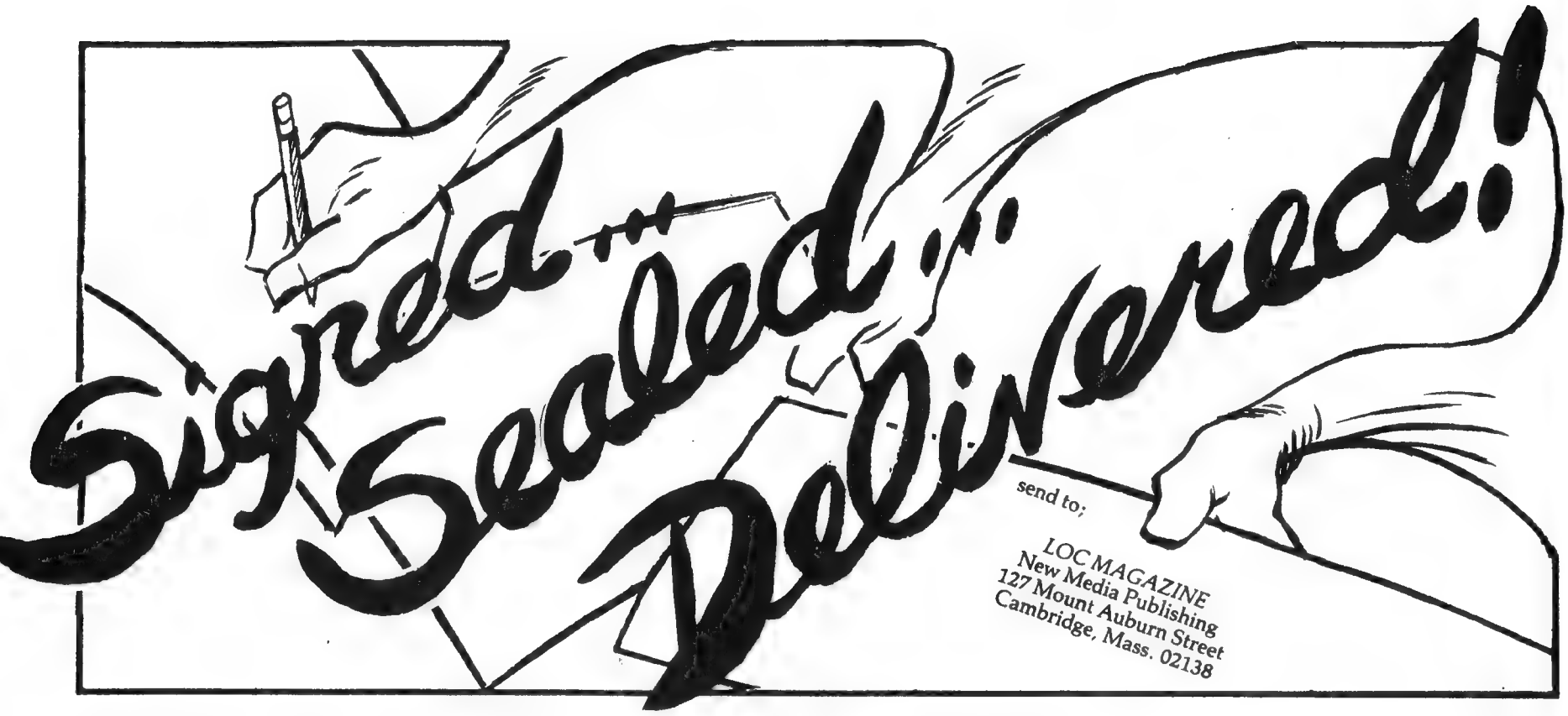


Dale L. Coe
Warrington, Cheshire, England

Dear Richard and Carol,

First of all, I want to congratulate you on producing **my** ideal fan-magazine. **LOC** is the 'zine I have always wanted to be involved in and many are the times I've longed to create this opportunity for fan communication. You beat me to it, but don't worry—I won't hold it against you.

There are two articles I specifically want to comment on, the first being **"Can Super-Hero Marriage be Saved?"** by Margaret O'Connell.

The crux of the matter seems to be the reluctance of comic book writers to "marry off" superheroes out of the fear of alienating the younger age-group of readers, the so-called "bubble gum brigade." Personally, I question the validity of this fear. **Do** the youngsters "identify with superheroes to the extent that they [the kids] do not want them [the heroes] to take on the moral obligations of adults? Of course, I can only speak [write?] from personal experience but I don't think I was much different from any other 8-year-old back in 1963, when I started collecting American comics.

My initial favorites were **FLASH, SUPERMAN, BATMAN, AQUAMAN,** and **JUSTICE LEAGUE.** Oh yes, and **"The Legion"** in **ADVENTURE COMICS.** I relished the imaginative adventures of the many colourful super-powered figures, as I am sure we all did. **But...**at no time did I doubt that Superman, Batman, and all the others were adults, the same as my mother and father. Nor did I doubt that, as adults, Clark Kent, Bruce Wayne, and their fellow heroes had responsibilities that I did not. This didn't bother me. It didn't spoil the fun for me [nor did it diminish my own desire to possess super-powers of my own].

When Aquaman married Mera in **AQUAMAN #18**, I was happy for them both. I continued to enjoy Aquaman's adventures up to the [first] cancellation of his comic. So I find it rather difficult to believe that lots of kids would stop buying a comic simply because the hero did something "adult." After all, adults have to work for a living [except, in those days, people like Bruce Wayne]. Did sales drop for the issues which showed [however briefly] Clark Kent working in the **DAILY PLANET** offices? Or were the kids put off by seeing Ray Palmer at work in his lab. I know I wasn't.

One final point on this subject: It was as much the "bubblegum brigade," myself included, which demanded more of Spider-Man, The FF, and The Hulk, despite their rather pessimistic view of superheroing.

Having said all that, I do not desire to see a **lot** of super-hero marriages, but only because the ones we've seen so far [with the exception of Aquaman] have been mishandled by the creative people and have bogged down their respective series [as seen vividly in **FANTASTIC FOUR**]. So until someone can figure out how to write a successful [creatively] marriage, I think they should leave well enough alone.

"My Heroes Don't Do That—And Get Away With It!" is the second and final article I want to respond to. In the matter of Phoenix's death, I have yet to find anyone who shares my view, which is: Jim Shooter was wrong to expect Phoenix to be punished for committing murder and not Wolverine—after all, killing one person [**X-MEN #116** among others] is just as wrong as killing billions [**X-MEN #137**]. But I believe that Phoenix **had** to die. Confused? Allow me to elucidate.

I have followed **THE X-MEN** since #4 with con-

stant passion. When I read #135 and realized that Jean Grey had killed a solar-system full of sentient life, I sat back and considered. My conclusion was the Jean Grey I had "known" all those years would not—could not—exist with such guilt. Of course, it occurred to me that Chris and John might give Jean amnesia upon her return to normalcy, but I would have been extremely disappointed with the use of such a plot device anyway. No, I told myself then, the best way to resolve the storyline would be for Jean/Phoenix to die.

Along came **X-MEN #137** and I was delighted that [apparently] Chris Claremont felt the same way as I did. [Suicide had occurred to me but I had dismissed it because of the Comics Code. I didn't expect the issue to be a non-code issue]. When I later read of the "behind-the-scenes" wrangle over Phoenix, I was glad that Chris had been overruled, even if [as I felt] for the wrong reasons.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to [possibly] share my feelings with other fans. I hope this letter sees print, not because I want to see my name in print but because I would be most interested in reading other fans' reactions to my opinions. Ah well, we'll see. Rest assured that **LOC** has an appreciative audience here in not-so-merry old England.

'Bye for now.

But only for now, Dale. Thanks very much for taking time out to tell us what you thought of the issues raised in those essays.

I think you might be in the minority, though, about never finding your super-heroes' absorbtion into the mundane world of adult values and habits a bit unsettling. Certainly it is not uncommon—especially these days—for a super-character whose adventures have stagnated to assume that his domestic stability is, if not the cause of creeping dullness, then at least the most easily disruptable aspect of the hero's career to gain some new excitement. Witness, for instance, the death of Aquababy, the indefensible character alterations which resulted in the breakup of Cyclops and Marvel Girl, the death of Iris Allen, and the forthcoming divorce of Yellowjacket and The Wasp. Marriage and/or the assumption of "adult" responsibilities and privileges may—as you suggest—not be the cause of the "bubble gum brigade" not being able to enjoy a certain hero's adventures, but as long as it's a facet of their strips which, when upset, generates more excitement [and presumably higher sales], you won't convince the creative teams of it. And you yourself fall into that line of thinking when you equate your lack of appreciation for the FANTASTIC FOUR's book with the

THAT MEANS AQUABABY SAVED ATLANTIS FROM THOSE BEASTS! HE'S A HERO... AND WITH HIS POWERS GONE, HE'S NO LONGER A THREAT!
YOUR SON'S EXILE IS OVER, AQUAMAN!
AND SO, THEN, IS OURS!
©1981 DC Comics
Did Aquaman's marriage scare readers off?

marriage of Reed and Sue Richards.

"My Heroes...," like the events which inspired it, is generating a lot of comment from our readers. Perhaps a few of the facts as they were explained to we editors by certain members of THE X-MEN's creative staff will add to your understanding of the total picture. First, as has been reported, Jim Shooter does not keep close enough watch over every issue of every Marvel magazine to be able to approve each character's actions "as they occur" [or at least he didn't then]. The murder committed by Wolverine was first noticed by him after it was too late to stop—according to one account, it was after Phoenix's dirty deed. When the matter was brought to Shooter's attention, he suggested having Wolverine being tried for murder, which was gainsayed in that the X-MEN had just gone through a series with Phoenix on trial for murder and they didn't want to repeat a plot so soon. To compromise, Shooter instructed the X-MEN creators to have Wolverine become more conscientious about the use of his powers, and conscience-stricken over its past misuses. X-MEN writer Claremont mentioned that he intended for new team leader Storm to take a hard line on the subject of killing when it could be avoided. There was also talk of bringing that guard in the Savage Land back to life.

X-MEN #137, by the way, was not a non-code issue. Probably the sticker fell off the cover, but all the pages were reviewed as usual.

You might be right in that there was no other way around killing Jean Grey [although LOC's editors thought of two scenarios in

which all could be resolved happily, and with no loose ends), but it seems clear that the ending as it appeared was a last-ditch attempt to resolve a hopelessly confused sub-plot gone mad and get on to something else. That the production made as much of an impression on fandom as it did says something for the expertise of the book's then-present creative team, but it won't salvage the work as a whole. By the way, John Byrne had a theory that Jean Grey was indeed killed in the space shuttle crash in X-MEN #101 and a malignant parasite assumed her body and memories, playing it cool until it had generated enough power to go on its natural rampages (at least that's how I remember the theory. John?) Therefore, not only did Phoenix have to die, but it didn't affect Jean Grey's fate a bit. She was already dead. (Some of us have to admit, too, that considering the almost total personality dissimilarity between the Jean Greys of the old and new "X-Men" series—com-

WHAT NOW, OH MIGHTY MASTER OF MAGNETISM?! HOW CAN YOU EVEN HOPE TO STAND AGAINST ONE WHOSE POWER--
--IS BORN OF THE RAGING SUN ITSELF!?!
I'M DOING IT! I'M FORCING MAGNETO BACK, BEATING HIM! FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, HE ACTUALLY LOOKS SCARED!
HER POWER IS A SONG WITHIN HER, FILLING HER WITH A PRIMAL GLORY, AN UNHUMAN JOY THAT SHE'S BEGINNING TO ENJOY MORE AND MORE.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group
Phoenix: Was she really Jean Grey, or an independent being?

mented on by Byrne in COMICS FEATURE #4 —it's a hard theory to refute. Mary Jo Duffy, on the other had, was of the opinion that the Phoenix entity was totally evil and could not have been gotten rid of, and it was only because Jean Grey was so good to begin with that the entity did not immediately turn rotten to the core and go berserk. Many theories seem plausible, probably because the "evidence" in the comics is so ambiguous. Certainly if the creators had wished to, they could have settled the matter in a happier manner.

Kurt Busiek
Lexington, Mass.

I'd like to respond to Bryan Uhlenbrock's letter in **LOC #2**. I'm perfectly willing to accept some of his criticism of my **"When Titans Clash"** article, but some of the things he said show, I think, that he missed my point.

First off, Bryan, I'll agree that my choice of words could have been better. The "rape" comments were meant as a humorous overstatement of what I thing was a rather tacky scene—but that wouldn't be picked up by anyone who hadn't read the issue in question. In retrospect, I find a lot of **"When Titans Clash"** muddy and/or awkward. I hope my other efforts in **LOC, COMICS FEATURE**, and **ARTFORM** show an improvement. The Metal Men do all have the same power, though; it's just that their different bodily compositions cause different manifestations and effects of their individual powers to manipulate one's own physical form.

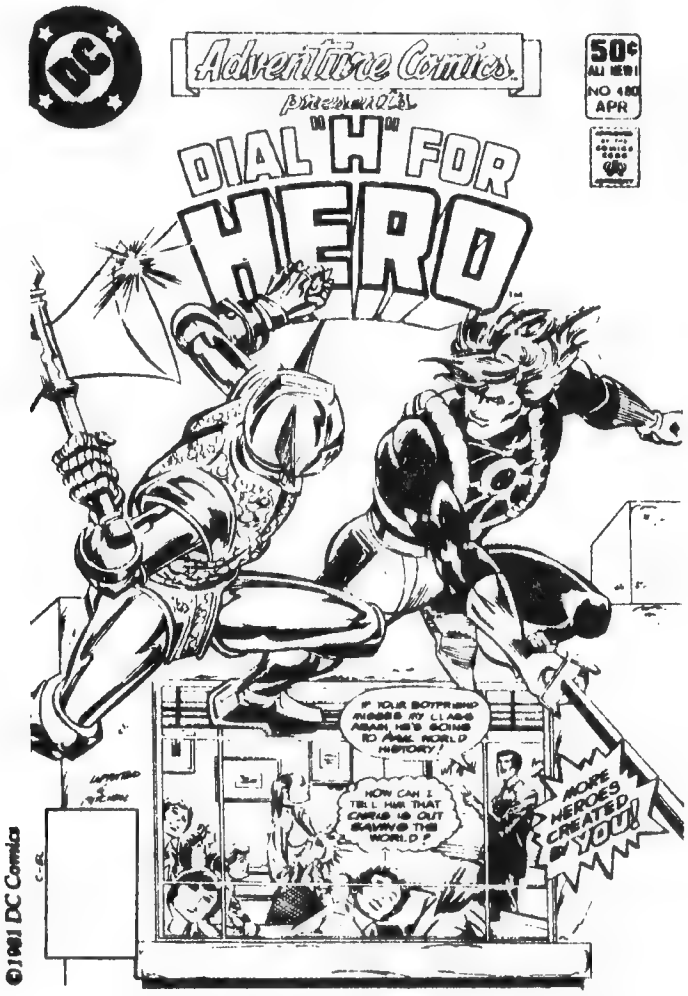
More importantly, however, I never advocated the notion that "any successful super-group must follow the pattern laid down by a previous sales success," and I agree that it's nonsense. But any writer who creates a team that does away with established bases of success and offers **nothing** to replace them is making a big mistake. If you'll remember, I held up The Legion of Super-Heroes as an example of a successful team that fits into neither Type One [collection of sales blockbusters] or Type Two [balanced, integrated team], which proves, I think, that it can be done. It's just that there has to be something to base a book's appeal on, and as far as I can deduce, The New Teen Titans is a compendium of unsalable elements.

Also, crediting The Fantastic Four with the total originality you seem to have shouldn't be done so easily. The balanced structure of the team is something you'll find in Kirby's "kid gang" strips, or in the cast of any good ensemble drama. Superpowers were all that was added—and the resultant team was certainly innovative and ground-breaking, but wasn't exactly an immaculate conception. [A minor aside: Stan Lee couldn't have created an "ersatz Justice League"—he had no sales successes on hand to make it out of!] More to the point, I'd hardly consider The Defenders a success; early issues were almost purely Type One material, and from there the book slipped until it held a low sales profile that depended heavily on The Hulk. Now J. Marc DeMatteis is attempting to supply that "something extra" to make the team work whilst being outside established success rules—a

"horror" orientation—but whether or not that will offset the loss of The Hulk remains to be seen.

The use of sales models is not a necessity, no, and neither is a guarantee of success, as you imply that I implied. The Invaders and The Inhumans did follow the rules, to some degree. But the powers and personalities of The Inhumans are nowhere near as easy to grasp as those of the original X-Men, The FF, The Doom Patrol, and so forth. Also, at fairly critical stages they were handled by writers and/or artists who didn't really understand what to do with them, and did not use the Type Two format as a basis for the material. I'll admit to being confused over **THE INVADERS**. Not only were they a Type One team, but a Type Two team as well! Three more issues and I'll have completed my collection—then maybe I'll write an article on them. [It might have something to do with Glut and Kupperberg's work on the title having little idea as to how to exploit The Invaders' stature and character, whereas Thomas and Robbins [who made the book a success] had a much better grasp on things.]

Anyway, should your opinion on either teams or Titans still not match mine, I encourage you to share your views with the rest of us **LOC**-writers and readers. Either in the letters section or as an article—**LOC** is a forum for ideas, and if you continue to contest mine, maybe I'll learn something. And maybe someone else'll pick up the ball and we'll get a real old-style controversy! [Anyone for "What is a mutant?"...]


Adventure Comics
50¢
DIAL "H" FOR HERO
HOW CAN I TELL HIM THAT CARMINE IS OUT SAVING THE WORLD?
MORE HEROES CREATED BY YOU!
©1981 DC Comics

The late *ADVENTURE COMICS. "Dial 'H' for Hero"* did not sell well enough to continue—it will reappear as a back feature in *SUPERBOY*—and DC has decided that anything they put into the book will sell better in its own title (where it can have an extremely collectable first issue).

Paul Balze
Glen Burnie, Md.

Dear People and fellow fans,

This letter is in regard to the comics review in **THE COMIC READER #188** [February 1981]. The review consisted of Mike Tiefenbacher's thoughts on the new **ADVENTURE COMICS PRESENTS DIAL "H" FOR HERO.** Mike seemed pretty pleased with the whole thing as of #481. Now, I agree that **"Dial 'H' for Hero"** [or "**DHFH**"] is a pretty good strip. However, there **are** some things that should be cleared up. For one thing, Mike, Carmine Infantino doesn't design the super-heroes' costumes alone. The readers who send in the ideas for characters also design the costumes, unless I misunderstand the creative process on this title. Mike also didn't touch on the kids at Chris & Vicki's school. This is a pity, because some of the kids have proven to be kind of interesting. For instance, there's the mandatory jock-bully type [Bradford Mann] who likes to show everybody how great and tough he thinks he is. Of course, he used to go with Vicki, so when she takes a liking to Chris, Brad gets tough with Chris. Chris however, treats Brad like one would treat a cold sore—annoying, but no big deal. There's also the funny fat girl [who, commendably, is not funny **because** she is fat, but just happens to make a lot of jokey remarks] and another girl who is a walking encyclopedia of contemporary American fads. And, Wonder of Wonders!—Chris King has not only a mother **and** a father, but—ready?—a **real**, **live**, **kid brother**!! [Gasp!] How many DC heroes can you think of who even have both parents living, much less an actual honest-to-God **sibling**? [I'm fully aware of the Storms, Summerses, Rasputins, Greys, etc. at Marvel].

There are a couple of things I object to, though. One is the current logo arrangement. The **"ADVENTURE COMICS"** is way too small. This is the same thing that bugs me about the current setup on **DETECTIVE**. I am of the firm belief that the title of the magazine should never be superceded by the name of the featured character. Now there are ways to remedy this situation and still get the **DHFH** across, and I'll send some to Len Wein as soon as I get a chance. As for **DETECTIVE**, I'm hoping that Dick Giordano will make a change for the better when he takes over as editor.

Another thing which strikes me as a clasically dumb maneuver is the official retitling of the book to

ADVENTURE COMICS PRESENTS DIAL "H" FOR HERO. Not only is this nearly as unwieldy as **BLACKSTONE THE MAGICIAN DETECTIVE FIGHTS CRIME** or, more recently, **MARVEL TEAM-UP STARRING THE HULK, POWER MAN AND IRON FIST**, but it has a potential for disaster. Suppose **DHFH fails**? Hey, it could happen. What then? Does the oldest continuously published comic book in the world get the axe? Or will we see covers proclaiming, **ADVENTURE COMICS PRESENTS DIAL 'H' FOR HERO STARRING THE HUNTRESS** or whoever? That's a pretty crowded cover. Of course, the ridiculously small **ADVENTURE** is not exactly a new idea for this book. Witness the tiny **ADVENTURE**-enormous-**SUPERGIRL** on #398-407, and the same format on #440-458 with the Spectre, Aquaman & Superboy.

Looking back, though, **ADVENTURE**'s history for the past 10 years seems to be one bad decision after another. In 1969, Supergirl got the book. Fine. She held it for three years, built up a whole supporting cast, and at one time had Mike Sekowsky as writer-penciller-editor (whatever happened to him?). Then, in 1972, someone had an idea! Let's give Supergirl her own magazine! Wonderful! However, did they just continue the **ADVENTURE** series that was apparently selling so well? Hell, no! In **ADVENTURE #424**, they got rid of the entire supporting cast, had Linda Danvers quit her job, and moved the series to another city. **SUPERGIRL #1** essentially started fresh with only Kara herself to bridge the gap from book to book. It didn't sell, and died after 10 issues in 1974. Meanwhile, Joe Orlando got **ADVENTURE** and he, too, had an idea! Let's cut out all the superhero action which has been selling the book for 375 issues and switch to **straight adventure! ADVENTURE #425** featured a Mike Kaluta cover, internal art by Toth and Nino, and a 50% frequency cutback to bimonthly. The "no super-heroes" dictum lasted one issue; #426 featured **"The Vigilante"** and **"The Adventurers' Club."** #427 contained more of the same. Then, in #428, **"The Black Orchid"** began her short run. Boy, was it short. #430 was the last one to feature The Orchid. She moved into the back of **THE PHANTOM STRANGER** and soon disappeared (are you still with us, MT?). #431 brought us the first episode of Mike Fleisher's now-infamous **"Spectre"** series. For those of you who were hibernating in 1974 and early '75, Fleisher's Spectre made the raging Batman and psycho Wolverine look like Sunday-school teachers. In #433, he turned a murdering medium into glass—and then smashed him on the floor. In #435 (my first exposure to the series at the tender age of ten) he froze one man in a huge block of ice and changed another into a wooden statue prior to running him through a buzzsaw. In #436, he changed a speedboat into an enormous squid which proceeded to eat the boat's driver—you get the idea. The incredibly gory adventures (ahem) ended with #440, though, and the Spectre went back into limbo, to be replaced by the longest-running feature **ADVENTURE** has had in nearly 10 years: **"Aquaman"**!! The series began in #441 and ran through a couple of nice multi-parters until #452, when he was kicked into his own revived book. **AQUAMAN** lasted an even shorter time than **SUPERGIRL**; revived with #57, it died exactly one year later, with #63. Superboy, meanwhile, took over **ADVENTURE**, reclaiming the spot he had held from 1946 until the mid-1960s when **"The Legion of Super-Heroes"** kicked him out. This triumphant return lasted a big 6 issues (#453-458), whereupon the Smallville Sensation (oy vey!) was absorbed into **SUPERMAN FAMILY** and **ADVENTURE** became a dollar comic. **ADVENTURE #459-466** had so many cast changes it was ridiculous, but there were some fine **"Deadman"** stories and, of course, the end of the **"New Gods"** revival and the last of the Levitz-Staton **"Justice Society"** tales intended for **ALL-STAR #75-77.** #466 was the last $1.00 issue, and also marked the end of eight years as a bimonthly book. #467, as the first **ADVENTURE** of the '80s, began the **"Plastic Man"** and **"Starman III"** run. The **"Plas"** stories were wonderful, much better than the abortive 1976-77 revival, and **"Starman"** was also good. However, they didn't sell so good. According to figures given in **ACPDHFH #481,** the average 1980 issue of **ADVENTURE** sold less than 80,000 copies, or about 26%. This is 4 points below cancellation city, folks. So now we have **"Dial 'H' for Hero."** I like it. I hope it'll last. Maybe it will. If not...well, I've always kinda liked The Huntress...she deserves a front shot...and she never **did** get her **SHOWCASE** tryout...Hmmmmmmmm...

There are indeed many characters who never got around to getting their SHOWCASE try-outs, Paul. How about ADVENTURE COMICS starring "The Creeper," or ADVENTURE COMICS starring "Deadman."

Yes, by the way, you're right about the relatively poor sales reports on the issues of ADVENTURE with "Plastic Man" and "Starman." Too bad, too, considering if that went over well, it might have spawned a new wave of double-feature magazines, thus giving some of DC's more cultish characters another shot at a regular berth. The present version of the double-feature books (the DC series with back-up features in them) certainly go some towards satisfying the need

for exposure of some characters who couldn't support their own titles, but there's still a very obvious distinction between what's the major feature in each book and what's filling up the back of the book. Perhaps that will change with the second wave of back-ups, as with the "Doctor Fate" series appearing in THE FLASH.

You're a little off the mark, though, in your appraisal of "Dial 'H' for Hero" being particularly noteworthy due to Chris' having an "actual honest-to-God sibling" though. In the first place, with the exception of Sue and Johnny Storm, none of the sibships in your examples are little more than lip service to the purported relationship. Scott Summers' brother's existence is suspect due both to Cyclops' personality (in the original series), and the specialized demands of The X-Men group in those days. Jean Grey's sister existed as an offhanded word balloon referenence for fifteen years, etc.

On the other hand, you're overlooking Hal Jordan's two brothers (about whom a virtual mini-series was constructed in the 1960s), Billy and Mary Batson, Lois and Lucy Lane, Lightning Lad and Light Lass, Aquaman and Ocean Master, etc. That's not exactly a good argument for Chris King's uniqueness.

Dear Richard and Carol:

I just picked up a copy of **LOC #2** at my friendly neighborhood comics shoppe yesterday, and already find myself overcome by an irresistable urge to write a letter of comment about it. Which, I suppose, is the whole point of the exercise.

Most interesting to me was Lou Mougin's well-researched essay on the treatment of religion in comics, partly because I've been looking forward to it for quite a while. My own comments on the subject in **THE COMICS JOURNAL** prompted Lou to drop me a line and for a while we were throwing ideas back and forth. He told me about his upcoming series in **LOC** and I'm glad to finally have a chance to read it.

To his remarks I can only add that if no one worshipped Thor at the time Stan Lee and Jack Kirby began their **THOR** series, that particular deity and his fellows have undergone a modest revival since then. While researching an upcoming article for the **JOURNAL** on the use of Norse mythology in comics, I ran across several quite genuine groups working to restore serious worship of Odin and the rest of the Norse pantheon. I asked the leader of one group what he thought of the comic book version of Thor, and got this reply:

"**THOR** comics are in many ways an atrocity. Different comic creators have presented the God of Thunder in different ways, some better than others, but at best there's a subtle mangling of the mythology. I had been gradually changing my viewpoint on **THOR** comics, from terrible to tolerable, on the grounds that almost any exposure is better than total forgetfulness, when something happened to raise my opinion of this medium even more. The 'something' was the gradual Christianizing influence our babysitter was having on my 3-year old son, Erik. Nothing super-heavy, but it was plain for example that he was getting the 'baby Jesus' routine at Yuletide—stuff like that. I didn't want to change sitters, so counteraction was called for. Kids in general and my boy in particular are impressed with an active, dramatic, colorful hero like Thor, so I brought home a couple of **THOR** comics as a supplement to a well-illustrated children's book on Norse mythology. Erik loved it. He's too young to absorb, or be harmed by, the sloppy mythology, but just ripe for the action and drama of our favorite Hammer-Wielder. It's got his interest—and with young kids, I feel Thor will win out over Jesus any day! The illustrations are the deciding factor; I didn't even read him the story in the comics version but just let him admire the drawings."

At the moment I notice that Thor is having adventures in inner city slums. I can imagine heroes like Spider-Man and Daredevil operating there, but a Norse thundergod is so wildly inappropriate and out of place that I shake my head in numb disbelief and wonder if anyone at Marvel Comics has any common sense left.

Kurt Busiek's fresh look at **LOIS LANE** interested me because he's coming in new to something I grew up with: the Weisinger Era of Comics. I notice quite a bit of renewed interest across fandom these days in the Weisinger books, too; I don't know if it's a spillover from people collecting **ADVENTURE** for Legion of Super-Hero stories and discovering the other stories in the books or just a natural development that had to happen sooner or later. At one time, serious fans despised the Weisinger books as being despicably silly travesties ruining the first and potentially greatest comic book character of all—well, maybe they were, but now that they're no longer a clear and present danger, they're worth going back and taking another look at.

I've lately become quite enthusiastic about collecting Weisinger comics, but until very recently haven't been altogether sure as to why. It isn't entirely a matter of recapturing boyhood nostalgia, although that certainly plays a large role; rather, I've been enjoying reading the stories for their own sakes, unbelievably stupid and contrived as many of them are.

Nor am I the only one. A friend of mine in Germany, an educated family man in his 30s, has been trading me for my doubles of Weisinger comics even though he has lost interest in most other com-

THAT NIGHT, AT THE MUSEUM...
AH, LOIS! SO YOU'RE "JULIET" TONIGHT! HOPING THAT "ROMEO SUPERMAN" MIGHT DO A BALCONY SCENE WITH YOU, ... PERHAPS?
YOU NEVER CAN TELL! I MIGHT, IF "LUCRETIA BORGIA" LANG DOESN'T... HA, HA... "POISON" SUPERMAN'S MIND AGAINST ME!
©1981 DC Comics

Lois Lane and Lana Lang, two of the friendliest enemies in comics. They got along well enough until Superman came along—and then it was every woman for herself.

ics. A package I sent of **LOIS LANES** arrived just when he was in the hospital for minor surgery, and he said later that reading and rereading the things was one of the few bright spots during his otherwise dreary recuperation. "In those days," he wrote, "comics were innocent and ignorant. Now they've lost their innocence but they're still ignorant."

It was another branch of the German connection that gave me a clue as to why I was enjoying the Weisinger books so much. **THE COMIC READER #191** reprinted an article from a 1978 issue of **THE WALL STREET JOURNAL** about a German Donald Duck/Carl Barks fan club, and quoted its founder's explanation of why he took his favorite comics so seriously: "[Hans von Storch] argues that studying Duckburg is like studying mathematics or physics in that you have an 'artificial system' in which an infinite number of questions can be asked. Every question can be answered, he says, by examining the evidence in the comic books themselves."

I think von Storch's explanation applies to the Weisinger comics as well, even though they certainly aren't as good as Barks' Duck comics. Weisinger took over a popular character and over a period of years built an entire world, complete with a detailed and complicated continuity, around him. Further, Weisinger's world functions in accordance with a fairly consistent set of rules, wacky though those rules are. He worked with a constant and well-defined cast of characters; readers with any sensitivity at all usually perceived the characterization as crude stereotyping at best, but the characters nonetheless had recognizable and consistent personalities, and they were all likable. Even Luthor.

Weisinger's world may be recognized someday as a forerunner of Marvel Universe-style continuity. After several years and hundreds of stories in several different books, Weisinger had built up a complicated history every bit as intricate as Marvel's. The attraction to me is that it didn't last as long and wasn't spread out over as many titles; collecting Weisinger isn't as daunting a task as collecting the Marvel Universe. It's finite and finished, and the only really expensive issues on the back issue market at the moment are **ACTION #252** [Supergirl's first appearance] and some of those **ADVENTURES** with the Legion.

Incidentally, Weisinger maintained that continuity by assuming the reader of any given issue of a given comic had no prior knowledge whatsoever of what had gone before. Detailed footnotes, dialogue in which characters explained things to each other that they obviously already knew, and thought balloons in which characters explained to **themselves** things they obviously already knew brought readers who had missed an issue up to date. When Mr. Mxyzptlk appeared, nobody ever just said: "Look! It's Mr. Mxyzptlk!" No, they said: "Look, it's Mr. Mxyptlk, that mischievous little imp from the Fifth Dimension who comes here every so often to plague us with his magic powers!" Superboy flying into his living room would think: "And there's Ma and Pa Kent, the kindly middle-aged couple who found me when I was a baby and adopted me!"

And I must admit that my liking for Weisinger's comics may also be related to... Odin help me... **camp!** Yes, dreaded "I-like-it-because-it's-so-bad-it's-good" disease! Weisinger comics have a certain fatal charm in that they **are** ridiculous. The concerns of living human beings in the real world have no relevance **whatsoever** to what goes on in the world of Weisinger! In the Supergirl story in **ACTION #295**, for instance, a flashback is shown in which the Luthor family, unable to stand the disgrace of having a renegade scientist for a son, disowns little Lex and skips town in the middle of the night. Mr. Luthor wants to spare Lex's sister the shame of it all, so when little Lena asks, "Where is brother Lex?", her father replies, "Er... your brother got killed in a mountain-climbing accident!" Certainly a heck of a thing to spring on the kid out of the blue—she probably didn't even know her brother climbed mountains. Weisinger comics are chock full of that sort of thing: bizarre character motivations used to justify odd little plots, ridiculous hoaxes set up to teach characters peculiar and unnecessary "lessons," mind-boggling coincidences, and a cheerful general ignorance of the way the real world works [never, for an example, does the **DAILY PLANET** feel like a real newspaper].

But it does make blissfully screwy sense when you realize that Earth-Weisinger is basically a **child's** view of the world. Weisinger aimed his comics at children and used real children as a sounding board or panel of taste testers. The **DAILY PLANET**

doesn't feel like a real newspaper because it isn't one: it's a child's idea of a newspaper, and all the child knows about newspapers is that there are people called "reporters" who are always out after something called a "scoop." The romance between Lois Lane and Superman seems cockeyed and unreal to an adult, but to a child, especially to a preteen boy who thinks girls are mostly pests anyway, it makes sense. Who actually read **LOIS LANE** is a mystery to me, but the letter column seemed to have more letters from girls than any other Weisinger book.

Oh yes, as your sidebar points out, **LOIS LANE** had terrific art by Kurt Schaffenberger. I remember

PRESENTLY...
LANA, YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHERE I'M CALLING FROM! I'M IN THE GUEST SUITE OF LANCE FORTUNE'S MANSION!
THE HANDSOME BACHELOR MILLIONAIRE? LOIS, HOW **LUCKY** CAN YOU GET?
©1961 DC Comics
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On the other hand, neither was ever able to pass up the first good deal to come along.

in particular one cover he did that sums up the whole Weisinger thing aptly [sadly, I no longer have the comic and can't cite the issue number]. In the story, Lois finally tricked Superman into agreeing to marry her, but at the same time both had been subjected to some sort of youth-restoring process. By the date of the wedding, Lois and Superman had reverted to babyhood and had to be rolled down the aisle in strollers. The marriage didn't come off because baby Lois couldn't pronounce the words "I do"—the only thing that came out was "Goo-goo" or some such. [Boy, is **that** a Weisinger plot!] On the cover, Schaffenberger drew himself in the church scene, looking down with a bemused expression at baby Superman and baby Lois being rolled along the aisle past his pew. Schaffenberger probably felt that way about a lot of the mind-numbingly ludicrous scripts he had to draw.

Charming though they are, however, the stories are **badly** told as comic-art narrative. As a general rule, Weisinger comics ran three stories an issue, which meant that even the most elaborate idea for a story had at most 12 pages in which to be developed. As a result, they aren't so much stories as plot summaries for stories that no one ever got around to fleshing out. There is no real panel-to-panel progression, so the stories don't **flow**. Rather, they read more like children's books, with separate and distinct illustrations explained by lengthy captions. In fact, the stories are told almost entirely through the **text**, rather than through the illustration. One reason why the stories read so strangely is because plot twists and turns that ought to have some build-up and development are instead thrown at the reader at breakneck speed, bam-bam-bam.

But what the heck, those comics are a lot of fun to read now. Perhaps the most striking thing is that with such well-defined characters to work with, Weisinger could do a lot of touching stories that had little or no sensational violence [such as comics are notorious for], but instead depended entirely on characterization and some approximation of human feeling. I can't see anyone else doing that now, not even the current crew handling **SUPERMAN**. So perhaps those crazy old Weisinger comics had more going for them than anyone ever knew.

Carol Kalish's article discussing **"Why Women Read Archie Comics"** was another essay that attracted my attention. I'm not sure if the question implicit in the title was really answered [unless it boils down to something like "Girls like warm and homey things, not fantasies of power and violence that boys like, so they like Archie Comics because Archie Comics are mainly human interest stories" —which doesn't exactly seem to square with feminist dogma as I understand it], and anyway, I'm probably not qualified to discuss it. I like **ARCHIE** myself, with qualifications. **ARCHIE** today may have its moments, but the newspaper strip is unusually unfunny when not puerile, and the comic book stories are by and large an uninspired production line affair. The early comic book stories in wartime issues of **PEP**, the newspaper strip when the late Bob Montana did it, the **LITTLE ARCHIE** stories by Bob Bolling—**those** are good comics!

Like Superman, Archie may be another character whose concept is so good that not even bad handling can ruin him. Kalish comments that characterization in the Archie comics was "very strange and exaggerated," but once in an idle moment I sat down and listed the names of all the continuing characters I could remember off the top of my head. I stopped somewhere after two dozen names. That was just in **ARCHIE**, and not including characters from **"L'il Jinx"** or **SABRINA** or **THAT WILKIN BOY** or **JOSIE AND THE PUSSYCATS**. Obviously, a lot of characters are identifiable on sight just

due to their function: Coach Kleats, Pop at the Chok'lit Shop, various parents—but model sheets apparently exist on all of them, and they're depicted and characterized consistently from story to story. That's a phenomenally enormous cast of characters and says a great deal for the strip's merits, since so many of them are memorable.

But what surprised me about Kalish's article was that she had to **explain** the **ARCHIE** concept—as though she assumed most of her readers would be completely unfamiliar with anything but super-hero comics. With the demise of just about all non-super-hero comics over the years, she may have been right in that assumption, at least as far as younger readers are concerned, but it sounded like **she** was astonished to discover a non-super-hero comic book series.

I was struck by it because about two weeks ago, I was editing an article submitted to the **ELFQUEST** souvenir album Fantagraphics is publishing, and ran across a paragraph in which the authoress praised EQ to the skies for not dressing its heroines in skintight costumes. In fact, she went on at some length about how most skintight super-heroine costumes weren't even practical, in contrast to the flowing gowns and robes and long dresses worn by Wendy Pini's lady elves. I got the distinct feeling that the writer wasn't aware that there had ever been comic books that didn't feature women in skintight costumes.

All I can say is that there is a whole **world** of comics out there, and outside of the United States, almost none of the comics have anything to do with super-heroes. Yet too many American fans seem to have the idea that a comic book without super-heroes isn't worth bothering with—and the declining comics market has spiraled down in ever-narrower circles to the point that only Marvel and DC, both publishers of super-heroes and little else, are calling the shots. No wonder it must seem to some people that super-heroes are all there are or ever will be. I can only hope that more European comics are translated into English and domestic alternatives, like the Eclipse projects, **CEREBUS, ELFQUEST**, and the like, become popular enough to show skintight costumes and the limited, stultifying Marvel-DC rut is not the **only** possibility for something as laden with potential for telling any and all stories as the comics medium is.

Unfortunately, you wouldn't know that by just reading **LOC**. Then again, perhaps Marvel and DC and super-heroes are indeed all your readers and writers are interested in talking about. But the comics field can be and is far wider than that. I hope you'll get letters from readers who will widen your magazine's horizons a bit.

With best wishes for your success,
Dwight R. Decker

Whew! Thanks much for your obvious interest in our achieving that success, Dwight. It is not, and never has been, our intention to pepper our various magazines with Marvel-oriented (and to a lesser extent, DC-oriented) articles. Those comics don't comprise the extent of our involvment with comics. The problem is, though (even beyond the normal demands of marketing the more obscure articles to be attractive to the average comics reader today by surrounding it with articles he will want to read), is that very few of our writers seem to be tremendously interested in writing about comics other than Marvel, DC, or the new wave of second-generation product from Marvel's and DC's 1970 alumni. The hardest two articles to assign in every COMICS FEATURE are the "comic strips" article and the "other" piece—and in comics art, "other" takes in a hell of a lot of ground. No, Carol Kalish was not astonished to discover that non-super-hero comics exist, but she judged (and correctly, we feel) that even those readers who think that they know what "Archie" comics are all about might not realize the universality and simplicity of the series' appeal. Hence the explanation.

We found your examples of Weisinger's "fill the reader in quickly" dialogue to be both hilariously funny and quite true to what appeared. He did, though, as you say, sustain a very complex and convoluted continuity, across seven-to-ten titles and ten-to-twenty-five years (and aiming for a young audience, as well. Silly as some of that dialogue sounds, it's too bad in a way that some of today's creators don't feel any similar responsiblity to re-introduce established concepts, characters, or plot-lines to newer readers.

It was (and is) hard to pin down exactly who read LOIS LANE, and why, but most of our editorial staff made it through their respective childhoods with nary a missed issue—and all for different reasons. Perhaps that illustrates Kurt Busiek's claim that one could find nearly any type of story in LL. The baby-marriage cover, by the way, was on #42.

Oh, and for a fine example of a touching-yet-still-juvenile LL story, try "The Unknown Superman" in LOIS LANE #49. It's highly recommended.

Dear Rich and Carol,

Having just finished **LOC #2**, and being in a mood to write a LOC on it, I was anticipating a bout of serious creative frustration. You see, the dorms close in three days, and I'm leaving the day after tomorrow, and my typewriter is stored away, so it looked like Our Hero would have to wait at least a

week to write this letter and I was Annoyed [note the capital "A," it's important], when a friend who owns an electric typewriter showed up to read this month's **ROM** and one exchange of favors later... here I am. About the magazine:

Overall, I think it was damn good. The letters section was pretty exemplary and demonstrated admirable taste in the choice of correspondence published. But I never toy with utter destruction. I sometimes flirt with virtual doom and I certainly dance slowly and langorously with complete annihilation on occasion, but never do I toy with utter destruction. Anyhow [no, I still haven't learned to stick to a point yet; just mark it off under "individual style"] I didn't find too much to take exception to in the letters column except for one statement made by Bryan Uhlenbrock. Personally, I feel that if any comics writer ever starts taking seriously the ideas he set forth in his criticism of the Wonder Woman piece comics is in for trouble; the notion that comics writers' beliefs actually affect the natural laws and constants of the universe they are writing is quite inherently chaotic. The solution proposed by Murray Ward to the inconsistency he postulated was ingenious and workable and I could not see that it would entail incredibly major overhauls of the character. I have no desire to be labelled an omni, but when inconsistencies can be explained, they should be, and not just passed off as "well, the writer wanted it that way" or "hey, that happened fifteen years ago in one obscure magazine that only four people have read, let's ignore it and it will go away."

On the articles: I find this month's **LOC** fascinating in that there are two articles that are so persuasive and well-written that they almost convinced me to go out and buy comics that I am almost absolutely certain that I wouldn't like. The two articles are Kurt's **"The Many Virtues Of Lois Lane"** and Carol's **"Why Women Read Archie Comics."** As I said, both articles were very well done and extraordinarily effective; I have read **LOIS LANE** and Archie comics and I know how damn silly and stupid they are but nevertheless I was almost convinced to go out and pick some up. This takes talent. Murray Ward's piece I found fascinating. The second half was very nice but it was the first half that made me stand up and applaud; it's very much about time that someone put down in concise and well-written prose exactly what was so heinous about the whole Dark Phoenix meshugga. Hooray, hooray! Rich's **"Bravo For Bravo"** I thought meandered a bit at the start; it didn't hurt that I heartily agreed with everything he said about **"Bravo"** and Alex Toth. Chuck Huber's **"That's What Friends Are For—Even In Comics!"** was really nifty. [I know, that word is juvenile, but I have tried to find another adjective to describe my feelings for the article and failed miserably.] Though the article gave, in my opinion, very little actual information, it was a lot of pure, unabashed fun to read—and he did point out any number of things that I had not really considered before.

Rich Morrissey's **"Where Have All The Heroes Gone"** was wonderful! I've wanted for years to see some intelligent commentary on both the plethora of imaginary cities and the multitude of heroes cavorting about New York. [I know, I know, if I wanted it that bad, why didn't I write it? Well...] I also had no idea that Metropolis was originally meant to be Cleveland—wonderful bit of trivia, that, and worth reading the article for all by itself. However, I do have to pick nits again—Daredevil ran about in San Francisco for quite a stretch under Gerry Conway, the Son of Satan always operated out of St. Louis, and The Cat was based in Chicago for her brief fling at super-herodom. Surely these count as examples of Marvel placing super-heroes in locales other than New York?

Margaret O'Connell's piece **"Can Super-Hero Marriage Be Saved?"** was quite well-written and well-conceived. It was fairly entertaining to read, though on re-reading I got the impression that she seemed to have tried to get just a bit too much mileage out of her one basic idea [i.e., that super-heroes don't get married because this would cause them to be resemble "real adults" too much and lose them too much of the kid audience's sympathy]. She did have some good points, though; I have been wondering why a character as dismal, unexciting, and patently useless as Kitty [Sprite] Pride should be so popular, and now I guess I know. However, I would just like to point out that the time-stretching she points out in comics is not really as blatant at Marvel as she seems to think; sure, for us Crystal has been pregnant for two years but remember, she only makes one appearance a month at best, and to her, those appearances may be only seconds apart. Of course, there's no plausible reason why Robin of Earth 1 will never grow up [from a realistic universe viewpoint, from a commercial viewpoint there are reasons galore] or why Clark Kent will forever be 29, no matter how many times we see the poor sap celebrate Christmas. But on the other hand, there's also no plausible reason that Zatanna doesn't say "Evil, cease to exist" backwards, either, and thus put all the DC super-heroes out of business. When dealing with completely unreasonable characters, one must expect completely unreasonable editorial policies. Also, I must point out a mistake she made in listing the married super-heroes who have children: she forgot at least two, possibly three sets of kids. Brock Jones, the Torpedo, is happily married and has three kids. Scott Lang, the new Ant-Man, has one daughter who figures prominently in his stories. And Dracula has at least one daughter and son that we know of, and must have more, since Frank Drake is known to be his descendant. Normally, I wouldn't count Drac but

Ms. O'Connell went to the extreme of listing Marcus [Ms. Marvel's son/lover/rapist] and if she's going to stretch it that far, I can include the Lord of the Undead.

Lou Mougin's **"God And Man In Comics"** was terrific! Not only well-written and witty, but it also presented me with quite a bit of incredibly fascinating information that I was completely unaware of. However, as I recall the Kid Eternity origin he was linked quite strongly with the Christian mythos; not only did St. Peter figure prominently, but there was also the Pearly Gates, the Book of Life, and other quite Christian details throughout. Other than that, I found the piece to be perfectly satisfying and wonderfully well-done.

Well, that's the good stuff. The only really negative comments I have are on S.J. Haskins' **"I Remember Friday Foster."** I found this article poorly constructed and shoddily written. It was potentially interesting in concept, but I found the author so overly enamored with his/her obviously expanded vocabulary that I couldn't make out exactly what was being said behind the plethora of polysyllables. The whole article was massively over-written, particularly the last couple of paragraphs on Storm.

The art reproduction in this issue was a vast improvement over the last issue. Apparently you decided to cover your bets, though, as I only spotted three bits of original art in the whole magazine. Rich's illo on the Lois Lane piece was really nice. The others looked pretty much like typical fanzine fare, though. C'mon, let's see more original art by good fan artists. I know they exist; do they just dislike **LOC**, or what?

I do apologize for not pointing out the flaws of the **"Future X-Men"** series. At the time I felt [and still do feel] that pointing them out would be a task more suited to an article than a letter; there were a **lot** of problems with that story. Maybe I'll essay the job sometime. And I also apoligize if anyone took individual offense to my "cold, calculating, dissecting, Vulcanoid criticism machines" comment. I did not mean it personally, but style of the article in question was extremely clinical and impersonal, to my eyes, at least. And that was all I meant to say with that remark. I humbly apologize for phrasing myself so badly.

P. Craig Russell
Kent, Ohio

To the Editor—

I've been sitting here enjoying the second issue of **LOC** and was surprised by Lou Mougin's **"God and Man in Comic Books"**—informative and interesting, but he failed to mention one of the most successful treatments of the subject. I'm referring to Burne Hogarth's **"The God of Tarzan"**. It was literate, intelligent and of the highest visual calibre, certainly a high water mark of the 1970s or any other decade [do you get the feeling this is one of my favorite comics stories?]. Anyway, a whole article could be devoted to dissecting this amazing piece, hopefully without the cloud of verbiage that surrounds discussions of this man's work. In a similar vein, I've been teaching a course in graphic story-telling to junior and senior illustration majors here at Kent State University, and Hogarth's work has been an important feature of the lecture section of class [not to forget, of course, Eisner, Lynd Ward, Toth, Krigstein, Steranko, Crepax, Windsor-Smith, Crumb, etc.].

I was also tickled to see an article on Archie Comics. For years I've been slightly embarrassed by the 1,500 Archies in my attic, but until **THE FANTASTIC FOUR** came out, they were my bread and butter. My favorite is an early 1960s cover of Jughead in which he's shown selling tranquilizers to students outside an exam room. With his perenially-closed eyes, I always figured him for a doper—but a **dealer**? [I don't have the issue number on hand, but I could certainly find it if you want verification.] There was also an issue in which Reggie lit up with a "My God" while the super-heroes were making do with "Good Lord's". Also gleefully suspect was Jughead [again] and his constant attempts to get Archie away from the **girls** and into the woods on a camping trip [uh-huh]. And the pin-ups in **Betty & Veronica Summer Fun** were hot stuff **loooong** before Brooke Shields.

Seriously, though, the high point of the series was Dan DeCarlo's work on **"Betty and Veronica."** I prefer his late-1950s numbers in particular—absolutely luscious—the work of one of the best craftsmen in the business. He could draw circles [literally and figuratively] around most of our "realistic" mainstream [Marvel and DC] artists. I'm sorry to see that his excerpted work wasn't credited in your article. When is one of the critical magazines going to do a retrospective of his work?

Maybe you?

Best wishes for continued success...

Why not us? As I told you, if we get a good article about his work, we'd more than happy to print it. The Archie article seems to have touched a fairly large core of formerly-hidden Archie fans. [Of course, we're sure there were other factors, like last year's BEST OF ARCHIE, but on the other hand, we can't deny our part—and we wouldn't.]

Don Schenk
Allentown, PA.

This is a true story, but you'll have to take my word for it. I realize that a good scholar always documents his statements, but the story goes back to '73 and I don't really save things that long. Anyway, to make a long story short, after I exchanged letters with a person named, if I remember correctly, Denys Howard over a letter I had written to Ted White's **AMAZING**, that person sent me his gay newsletter, in which I was offered as a bad example. The main article in that newsletter was about the Sue Richards almost-divorce in the **F.F.**—he was mad that it didn't come off. Because the fact that Sue was shown to be in love with, of all people, her husband, along with the fact that the Code at the time didn't allow heroes to get divorced, was thought to be an indirect act of disapproval of homosexuality—marriage was shown to be enjoyable and desirable and therefore homosexuality couldn't be everything its supporters said it was.

Okay, you say, so what? There's plenty of fruitcakes running loose. Ah, but he announced that he was starting a letter-writing campaign, and soon enough I read an article in which the then head of the Comics Code announced that he had received a letter complaining that the Code's prohibition of divorce was unreflective of modern society, and that he agreed. Sure enough, Power Man started going out with Black Goliath's Ex, and Hellcat started to refer to "that louse, my ex-husband."

Do you see what I'm getting at? "Gasp. Choke. You're not in favor of —censorship, are you?"

Uh, yeah. Or to be more precise, since there is censorship of comics in that it's generally agreed that they teach values to their younger readers while the children aren't noticing, how about a little more censorship in the direction the children's parents have been led to believe that censorship is applied, even if we have to have a little less political censorship to keep the stories interesting?

To give an example: do you remember back when the Black Widow was elected head of the late Champions, and Marvel received letters about how sexist the whole thing was because the Angel made a remark about her looks? And Marvel apologized? The Black Widow is usually drawn with high cheekbones, flowing hair, regular features, and a slim yet muscular body that's flat and round in all the right places—and the Angel is supposed to act as if he doesn't notice her appearance while she's standing in front of him clad in skin-tight vinyl? Even that model of chastity, St. Thomas Aquinas, maintained that anyone who didn't have sexual urges had something amatter with their head [whether or not people who weren't married should give in to them is another story, though]. A few years pass, and The Angel and his girlfriend are shown with co-ed living arrangements. Okay, so maybe she's just a friendly girl who likes to make herself at home when she visits, but what happened to all the people who were ready to pounce on him for being too blatantly heterosexual a few years back? Maybe my values are all wrong, but I see nothing amatter with someone noticing that a member of the opposite sex is sexually attractive, but it does bother me to see a couple working on making babies without having first made some formal committment to providing those children with a stable home-life.

I could make other examples. The Marvel universe shudders in fear at the thought of National Socialism, while the Soviet and Maoist Socialists are—well, a bit strange, but they don't bother us so we don't bother them. American corporations, on the other hand, take over foreign countries and wipe out large populations—while their friends in media and the Federal Government cover up the fact. That may be true in the Marvel Universe, but Carter would still be in office if people believed it was true in ours.

In the same "possible future" issue of **THE SUPERMAN FAMILY** in which it is revealed that Supergirl will go through a series of "relationships" that rarely last more than a year [she's going to be the first Governor of Florida to openly live in cohabitation], Lois receives the "bad" news that she's pregnant, and Superman, who sweats at the thought that he might have to kill a rampaging monster, calmly discusses with Lois whether or not to torture their child to death.

It's a strange form of censorship that allows Conan the Barbarian to be a hero while violating other people's civil rights, as long as he doesn't make a "sexist" or "racist" remark.

And not that we're in favor of—censorship, Don, but editorial opinion was divided somewhat on printing your letter. The major problem we had was that several people here would much prefer that, if LOC is going to serve as a forum for debates which originated elsewhere, we'd like to have records of exactly what was said in those previous exchanges. Your first paragraph was not only an account of yours and Denys' difference of opinion delivered by one of the debaters in question—but it sounded like it, too. We're afraid that we don't quite grasp any immediate connection between Sue Storm Richards running off with The Sub-Mariner and Marvel's official disapproval of homosexuality, either, but we'd rather hear Denys' arguments from Denys—they might be more clear then.

That having been said [and if you're reading this, Denys Howard, consider it an in-

vitation), we'd have to admit that several of your points are very interesting and certainly worth discussing. The portrayal of "real life" in comics—including, of course, the less wholesome aspects of same—is a subject which will probably never be exhausted. There are as many arguments for either side as there are aspects of the problem or examples of "real life" instances which should/shouldn't be shown in a comic book. The question has ramifications: If divorce is a fit subject for comics presentation (as the most realistic way out of an undesirable situation), then what about the protests over super-heroes who kill their opponents. Is that the most realistic portrayal of ordinary human behavior under extraordinarily tense circumstances? Is the former a fit subject for comics because the writer arbitrarily decides it's the "right" thing to do under certain circumstances? Does that mean that the latter circumstance could also be considered "justifiable conduct?" Who's to decide what? The Comics Code? The individual writers or editors? What about those writers who do not admit that their work in comics has any effect as an example upon children? How about those writers who insist that they're not writing for children anyway?

As concerns your example of Marvel backing down under criticism of Angel's debatably-"sexist" remark to The Black Widow, we can't help but agree that they were over-reacting. Certainly a little normal flirting needn't be considered a dehumanization of womanhood. Again, the question poses still more questions. How much of normal social behavior between adults can be considered exploitatively sleazy, or unnecessary, or—here's that concept again—unrealistic? Certainly if The Angel continued to make unsolicited commenments about Natasha's painstakingly-maintained muscle tone and cosmetic proficiency, either The Widow or the readers should have objected—but a hue and cry over one remark is a little silly.

And as for the living arrangements between Warren and Candy Sothern (continually spelled wrong by scripter Claremont), if a defense is necessary for that, one could at least maintain that such concessions to verisimilitude are allowable in that they are merely presented, not commented upon. If a young reader didn't already suspect Mr. Worthington and Ms. Sothern of setting up communal housekeeping, the information in the comic book itself would not enlighten him. It's not stated, so the reader must already know what's afoot to know what's afoot.

If, on the other hand, you're objecting to the possibility of some more impressionable readers interpreting their heroes' living arrangements as a condoning of those living arrangements, we're back to the differences

AND I DO LOVE THAT BIG WONDERFUL GUY!
IF ONLY WE COULD LIVE LIKE OTHER PEOPLE--JUST FOR A LITTLE WHILE!
BUT, I SUPPOSE IT'S TOO MUCH EVER TO HOPE FOR!
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between representing reality and representing a predetermined concept of role models.

We also must agree that the presentation of the American government (including various espionage agencies) in comics—particularly Marvel comics—is ill-researched and shocking in its implications. This may be the subject of a future article, so we don't want to go into it too deeply here, but are you aware that in one comics series currently appearing, an independent government agent has amassed the resources to build an army of killer robots (presumably costing several thousand dollars apiece) for the express purpose of incarcerating or eliminating a minority group of U.S. citizens—and he has done so with the permission of the President of the United States? And that the President amassed the money for this project without going through any of the normal—unavoidable—governmental channels for appropriations? One wonders if the people constructing these stories have any knowledge whatsoever of their own country's government.

You are wrong about the SUPERMAN FAMILY example, by the way. Neither Superman nor Lois suggested an abortion, and it was not even implied.

So what do the rest of our LOC readers out there think about this question (or series of questions)?

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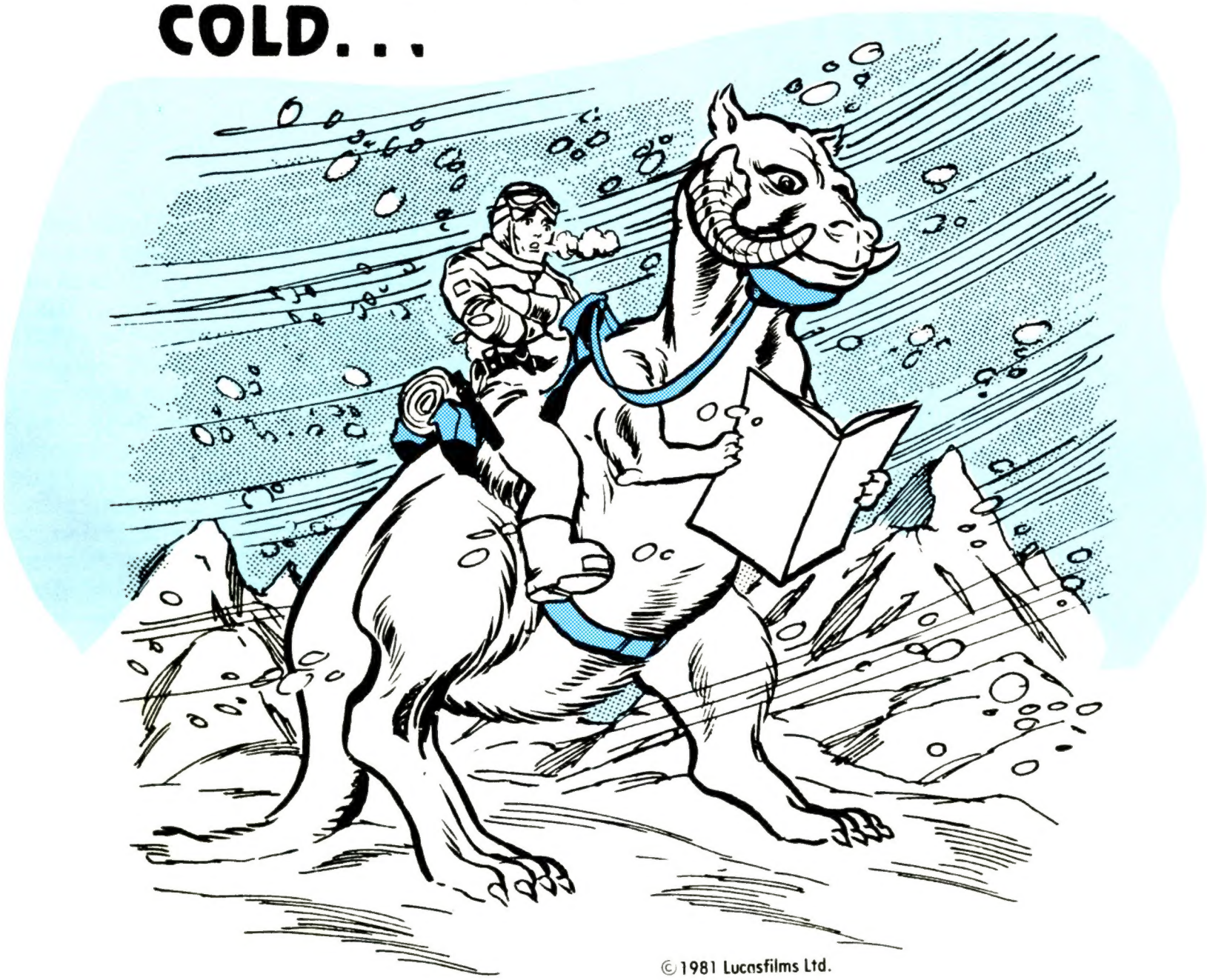

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